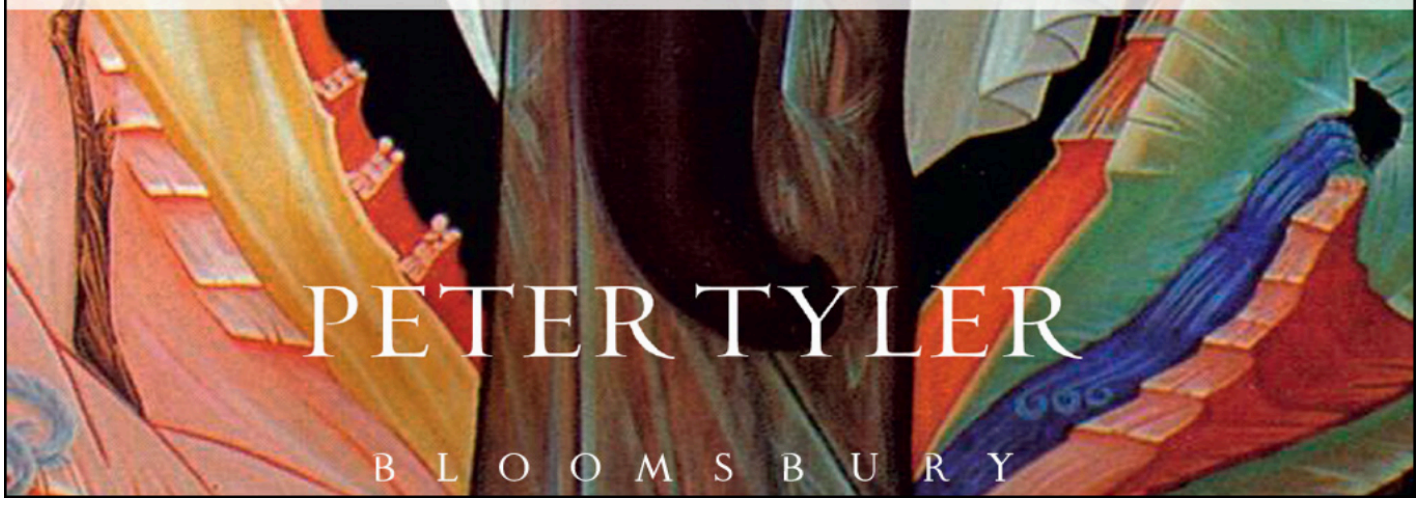
St John of the Cross



PETER TYLER

BLOOMSBURY

St John of the Cross

Peter M Tyler

B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

Contents

Introduction: Why John?

1 ‘An Odd Person in an Odd Country at an Odd Time’
2 John the Theologian
3 John the Mystic
4 John the Psychologist
5 John the Artist
6 John and Interfaith Dialogue
7 John for Today: Pastoral Theologian and Spiritual Director

Acknowledgements
Bibliography
Footnotes

Introduction: Why John?

I hear my love
See how he comes
leaping on the mountains,
bounding over the hills.
My love is like a gazelle,
like a young stag.

See where he stands
behind our wall.
He looks in at the window,
he peers through the opening.

My love lifts up his voice,
he says to me,
'Come then, my love,
my lovely one, come.
For see, winter is past,
the rains are over and gone.

Flowers are appearing on the earth.
The season of glad songs has come,
the cooing of the turtledove is heard in our land.
The fig tree is forming its first figs
and the blossoming vines give out their fragrance.

Come then, my love,
my lovely one, come.'

The Song of Songs 2: 8–13

Over the four hundred years since his death in Spain in 1591 Juan de Yepes, or as he is more commonly known, St John of the Cross, has been perhaps one of the most misquoted and misunderstood of all the writers in the Christian spiritual canon. Dean Inge, writing of him in his *Christian Mysticism* of 1899, says that John 'carried self-abnegation to a fanatical extreme, and presents the life of holiness in a grim and repellant aspect' (Inge, 1899: 223). The association of the phrase 'Dark Night of the Soul' with his name has led to many misconstruals of his approach to the spiritual life—usually centred around, as Inge describes it, welcoming 'every kind of suffering' and 'always choosing that which is most painful, difficult and humiliating'. Yes, it is true that John lived a difficult life—sixteenth century Spain was no bed of roses, especially if, like John, you were born 'on the wrong side of the tracks'. Yet, to portray him as some sort of pain freak or masochist is to miss completely the thrust of his message. If anything, his spirituality is closer to that of the *Song of Songs* with which we began—ecstatic, erotic, sensual and loving—a poem which he loved throughout his life and influenced much of his own mature writing. From the depositions given after his death for the process of his beatification (one of the main sources we have for his life and personality) he comes across as a deeply loving, gentle and caring soul. People travelled great distances to seek his advice and counsel and he was known for the gentleness of his pastoral touch—undergoing mortifications himself but never insisting on them for others or laying burdens on people greater than they could withstand.

So how has this misunderstanding of John arisen?

We can cite many factors. A 'complete' edition of John's writings in English did not appear until 1864 translated by David Lewis (See Payne, 2000) yet it was not until 1935 that the first scholarly edition of his works appeared in English, translated by the great hispanist E. Allison Peers (Allison Peers, 1935). The more recent translation by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, 1979) has extended

scholarly interest in John's work and allowed a flowering of sanjuanist scholarship in the past twenty years or so. This was enhanced at the four hundredth anniversary of John's death in 1991 when a slew of excellent scholarly articles were commissioned, many of which have been drawn upon in the writing of this book. The event was helped by having a pope, John Paul II, who had a keen interest in the mystic and had written his doctoral thesis on the saint (see Wojtyla, 1981 and John Paul II, 1990). Yet, despite new research on his work, the label of the 'gloomy saint' remains and it seems as though it will take some time for John to acquire his place in the hearts and minds of Christians everywhere.

The aim of the book, then, will be to explore all the facets of John's character and writing which, I will argue, make him an important guide for 'practical theology' today. I note that most of the books on John in English tend to cover one aspect of his extremely varied and multi-faceted personality and work. This book will try to give an overview of a wide variety of perspectives on John and his work to orientate the reader for further study in any of the areas discussed should they so wish. My contention is that at a time of rapid change and innovation in the churches (not so unlike John's sixteenth century) we can fruitfully study the teachings of this most enlightening doctor of the soul to help us in a time of disorientation and confusion. As well as excellent recent studies in English by Thompson (2002), Howells (2002) and Matthew (1995) I will be drawing on the great body of recent Spanish scholarship (see bibliography for details) as well as the accounts of his beatification process. My aim will be to rescue John from some of the stereotypes to which he has succumbed and reveal how his extraordinarily subtle approach to the Christian life utilises psychological, philosophical, theological and aesthetic approaches in a unique synthesis.

The book begins with an account of John's life and times. As indicated John was a son of a time of turmoil, a world 'riven by flames'[1] as the Reformation begun in the early sixteenth century hardened into polarised attitudes between the 'Roman Catholic' and 'Protestant' factions as the century wore on.[2] Into this fiery mix Spain herself was having to adjust to two significant changes in her fortune: the influx of wealth and cultural impact of the discovery of the 'Indies' and the relatively recent transition of Spanish culture from a medieval period where the 'three cultures' of Islam, Judaism and Christianity more or less coexisted on the Peninsula to a situation of Christian homogeneity. As these changes were wrought in Spanish society the new learning of the Renaissance was filtering into Spanish consciousness. All, as we shall see, had an impact on John's life, thought and approach to how the Christian life should be lived. John's responses to the maelstrom within which he found himself provides the material for his extraordinary body of writing which will occupy us for the rest of the book.

John's writings can be divided into two groups: the poems and the prose commentaries upon them. As we shall see throughout our investigation, the history of the writings has been chequered and the difficult circumstances of their gestation has meant that we have had to do some detective work in piecing together when, how and why certain pieces were written at certain times.

Regarding the poems there is now universal agreement that they are some of the finest in the Spanish language, despite some excellent attempts to translate them into English[3] they effectively defy translation and really must be read in Spanish to appreciate their 'beautiful sounds'. In Chapter Five we shall consider the genealogy of the poems, especially the *Spiritual Canticle*, in an appreciation of John of the Cross as a distinctive Christian artist.

Of the prose commentaries four of them have come down to us: two as commentaries on the poem that begins *En una Noche oscura ('In a dark night')* which are called today respectively *Noche Oscura/The Dark Night of the Soul* and *Subida Al Monte Carmelo/The Ascent of Mount Carmel*.[4] Two versions (or redactions) of the commentary on the poem that begins *¿Adonde te escondiste, Amado…? ('Where have you hidden, beloved?')* which are respectively called *Cántico Espiritual/The Spiritual Canticle* Redactions A and B and finally two redactions of the poem that begins *¡Oh llama de amor viva…! ('Oh Flame of Living Love!')* that are called *Llama de Amor Viva/The Living Flame of Love*, Redactions A and B. Of these commentaries (and poems) we possess only a handful of pages actually written in the saint's own hand: a few pages of maxims, some letters and administrative documents written whilst Vicar-Provincial in Andalusia (See Allison Peers, 1935: 1.1). The rest of our manuscripts are copies made during and after the saint's life which circulated amongst the houses of the reform. Some of these, such as the Sanlúcar de Barrameda Codex of the *Spiritual Canticle* (Redaction A) contain corrections in the saint's own hand which have helped with the authentication of the provenance of the manuscript (see Chapter Five below).

John, as we shall see in the following chapter, died under something of a cloud within the Reform which he had himself initiated. He remained a controversial figure for some time afterwards and no effort was made to publish his writings after his death. In September 1601, ten years after his death, a resolution was passed in the General Chapter of the Reform that the works of the founder (not yet a saint) should be published under the guidance of P. Juan de Jesús María and P. Tomás de Jesús (See Allison Peers, 1935 1.lxi) which decision was reinforced two years later. Sadly, due to other commitments on the part of the friars chosen this scheme did not come to pass.

The second attempt to publish the works was more successful and the first edition of John's works (the

so-called *editio princeps*) was published in Alcalá in 1618 under the title *Obras espirituales que encaminan a una alma a la perfecta union con Dios*, edited by P. Diego de Jesús with a biographical note. For reasons that we shall see later all three prose works were included in this *editio princeps* except *The Spiritual Canticle*. As a commentary on *The Song of Songs* that did not refrain from the fullest expression of the erotic element of the canticle it was probably deemed prudent to omit from the writings of a saint who was still viewed with some suspicion in certain quarters. This, combined with fears of accusations of *alumbradismo*[5] (which we shall return to later) meant that John's first editor, P. Diego de Jesús, took some liberties with John's text, adapting and correcting passages that he thought may be unacceptable. Despite Diego de Jesús's best efforts forty propositions were still extracted from the *editio princeps* and reported to the Holy Office for censure. This was sufficient for the first edition to be withdrawn from circulation, however it also prompted a spirited and theologically subtle defence from the Augustinian Fray Basilio Ponce de León, nephew of F. Luis de León, whose own works had led to his arrest by the Inquisition some forty years earlier. Ponce de León's replies are reproduced in English in Volume III of Allison Peer's 1935 translation of the *Obras* of John and reveal much of the depth and subtlety of John's approach to the mystical life, much of which we shall draw on in Chapter Three.

The 1630 Madrid republication of the *editio princeps* finally included the *Spiritual Canticle* whose own publication history took many complicated twists which I shall examine in Chapter Five.

Between the 1618 and 1630 editions the other significant development in the dissemination of John's works was the first French translation of the *editio princeps* by René Gaultier in Paris 1621: *Oeuvres spirituelles pour acheminer les âmes à la parfaite union avec Dieu*. From the anglophone perspective this translation is important as the likely source for one of the first English references to John's works—in the mystical writing of the English recusant priest Augustine Baker. In the *Secretum*, his commentary on the English medieval classic *The Cloud of Unknowing*, he gives references to *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* as well as *The Living Flame of Love* by 'Blessed John de Cruce' (see Clark 2003: 65) suggesting his familiarity with the French edition rather than the Spanish edition, the former of which he encountered during his time in France and the Low Countries.[6]

In Chapter Three I shall return to the vexed question of John as 'mystic'. In this chapter I shall look at how (following in the tradition of Baker) the mystic interpretation of John has arisen. We will see where this arises and how John uses the Dionysian tradition he had encountered at Salamanca University to express his own theology of the Christian life.

This broader theology will be explored in Chapter Two when I shall place John's approach to the Christian life within the context of the wider Christian theological framework. Here we shall see that John offers a picture of the Christian life which is remarkable in its original insights whilst appropriate to many of the theological challenges Christians find themselves facing once again today.

In this respect, Chapter Four will explore some of these challenges by assessing 'John the psychologist'. John himself in his writings urges Christians to make use of 'experience, the sciences and Sacred Scripture' (A 1.2) and in this light we shall see how his approach to human personality, from his sixteenth century perspective, can be related to contemporary psychological accounts of personhood.

Finally, another contemporary perspective which will be brought to bear on John's writing, will be that of interfaith relations. In Chapter One we shall see how much John owes to the Jewish and Muslim matrix out of which Spanish sixteenth century society arise. In Chapter Six I shall assess the importance of these influences and regard how John has been interpreted in relation to other faiths over the past century.

I shall conclude the book by looking at John as a 'practical theologian and spiritual director' and assessing the importance of his contribution to Christian life and thought for today's world.

Whilst there will be an element of systematisation at work in this book I hope to retain some of the wildness and flame of John's spirit. There is a wildness to Spanish spirituality which John possesses in abundance. In an age that tends towards standardisation and a taming of the spirit the works of John are a constant reminder to us that the Spirit of Love will constantly break all bounds and come 'looking in at the window and peering through the opening'. We began by mentioning Dean Inge's account of John as the 'gloomy mystic', we can on the other hand go too far the other way and make John into a rather straight-laced systematic theologian. He is neither and one of the central aims of this book is to preserve the otherness, rawness and sheer oddness of John; as W. H. Auden calls him 'the odd person in the odd place at the odd time'. Several times whilst writing this book I have noticed John's tendency to 'rub up' the authorities the wrong way (in this he has good Biblical precedent). As you read the account of this extraordinary man I hope the same questions will arise to you: 'Why did this man excite such controversy?' 'Why was it felt necessary to put him in prison?' 'Where did this man get the spirit to engage in his extraordinary feats of creativity and bravery?' And as you contemplate these questions I hope like me you will receive a renewed awe and respect for the 'wild man of Castille'.

John is, in the words of Federico Ruiz, the 'great integrator' (Ruiz, 1990: 17). Thus, my argument in this

book will be that John as a multifaceted, ‘myriad minded man’ is an Outstanding Christian Thinker. Within this book we shall encounter many facets of his genius for living the spiritual life: John as mystic, artist, theologian, psychologist and initiator of dialogue with other faiths, however at the end of the book I will conclude that John can best be understood for Christians today as a ‘practical theologian’ *par excellence* who offers clear and practical help to Christians today in their journey to encounter with the Living Lord at the centre of their lives. John is the inheritor of the medieval tradition and he is our contemporary.

So, I invite you now to come into the night, not the cold, wet, dismal night of the North but the warm silky Spanish night of high summer full of delicate scents, murmuring sounds, strange birds, moths and insects and the light breeze ‘that wounds from the turret’. The dark night of a land often more Muslim or Jewish than Christian that, in our own troubled times, speaks once again of a means of reconciliation between the three children of Abraham…

1

‘An Odd Person in an Odd Country at an Odd Time’

‘That arid square, that fragment nipped off from hot
Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive Europe’
(*Spain* W. H. Auden, 1979)

Origins

Writing a review of Gerard Brenan’s biography of John of the Cross in *The New York Review of Books* shortly before his death, the British poet W. H. Auden teferred to John as ‘An Odd Ball in an Odd Country at an Odd Time’ (Auden, 1973). In this respect Auden was repeating some commonly held views regarding John and Spain.

First, the perceived ‘oddness’ of Spain. In some respects he was right as Spain has always been the ‘exceptional case’ in Europe. Part of this arises from its unique history with respect to the rest of Europe. Shortly after the revelations to the Prophet Muhammed and the beginning of Islam, in 711, a combined force of Arabs and Berbers from the Maghreb crossed the straits of Gibraltar under Musa Ibn Nuseir and defeated the last Christian Visigothic kings of Spain at Guadalete. The invading forces quickly captured Sevilla, Córdoba and Toledo and by 714 much of the North of Spain had been occupied. The new government promised freedom of worship to both Jews and Christians, and, combined with the unpopularity of the former Visigothic kings and intermarrying between the two groups, quickly established an atmosphere of reconciliation. The subsequent history of the Peninsular saw the establishment of broadly Muslim governments in the middle and south of the land and the slow reemergence of Christian kingdoms in the North. By 1085 the so-called Christian *Reconquista* or ‘Re-Conquest’ of Muslim Spain reached a significant turning point when the ancient capital of Toledo was retaken by Alfonso VI. The king, like his fellow Muslim viziers, respected the rights of his co-religionists in the city and laid the foundations for a great ‘School of Translators’ to arise in the city under the later King Alfonso X—*El Sabio*, or ‘The Wise’. With the fall of Córdoba and Sevilla to Christian armies in 1236 and 1248 respectively most of the main stretches of Southern Spain had fallen into Christian hands. The next 200 years saw the Christians consolidating their new lands whilst the Emirate of Granada ensured that the Southern tip of Spain, including the Alpujarras mountains, remained under Muslim control. This small kingdom finally fell to *Los Reyes Católicos*—‘Their Catholic Majesties’—Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, thus marking the end of almost eight hundred years of Muslim, Christian and Jewish interaction on the Peninsula which continues to fascinate and challenge scholars to this day.

Since Américo Castro’s *The Spaniards* of 1971 it has been commonplace to talk about the High Middle Ages in Spain as a period of *Convivencía* or ‘living together’ of *Las Tres Culturas* of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Whereas contemporary scholarship would tend to temper some of Castro’s more rosy views of *Convivencía* there can be no denying that a quite unprecedented mixing of the three cultures did occur in medieval Spain even though the social situation was probably more akin to an Indian-type ‘caste system’ than a contemporary European multi-culture society.

From the late fourteenth century onwards a series of natural disasters and friction between the newly triumphant Christians and their Muslim vassals led to a wave of pogroms and massacres. This culminated in two decisive acts for the future of St John of the Cross and his co-religionist St Teresa of Ávila: the formation of the Spanish Inquisition in 1478 and the explusion or forced conversion of Spain’s Jews in 1492. The latter date also coincided, as we have seen, with the final fall of the last Muslim kingdom of the Peninsular, Nasrid Granada, to the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella.

From 1492 onwards we can see the history of Spain as reflecting a growing tendency towards cultural

homogenisation whilst at the same time large portions of the population harboured some unease from awareness of their own 'impure' cultural background. So-called 'New Christians' or *conversos* realised from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards that they would face increasing social restrictions.[7]

In this context it is interesting to note an incident that occurred to John in his latter years when he was Prior of the New Carmelite foundation in the centre of the old Nasrid fortress of the Alhambra in Granada. As a young man John had not been expected to achieve much academically and was taught bricklaying and carpentry, amongst other skills. He practised these arts to the end of his life, and whilst at the Alhambra built aqueducts to harness the waters of the famous palace to water the friary's vegetable garden (some of which are still standing today). One day he was observed by a fellow friar who commented he must be 'el hijo de un labrador auténtico', literally, 'the son of a true farmer'. However, interestingly enough, John replied 'Hijo soy de un pobre tejido'—'I am the son of a poor weaver' (See Crisógono, 1958: 211 and Egido, 1990: 342, quoted from Fray Agustín de San José in the Jaen *Proceso apostólico*). Unlike the *labradores* who were associated with the Christians of 'pure blood' who had survived 'untainted' by Muslim or Jewish blood in Northern Spain, *los tejidos* were associated with an industry heavily populated by Jews, Muslims and 'new Christians'. Indeed, some commentators have suggested that some of the persecution John received later in life may have stemmed from knowledge (real or implied) of his 'new Christian' blood. José de Jesús María Quiroga, one of John's first biographers, calls John's words 'a confession of humble blood, completely contrary to human esteem' (1628: I.46) which is in contrast to other of John's earlier biographers who insist on his noble blood and gloss over the possible *macula (stain)* of mixed blood (See Egido, 1990: 343).[8]

The disputes over 'purity of blood'—*limpieza de sangre*—had simmered in Spain since the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 but reached a head in the decade of John's birth in 1542. The crisis point came in the ancient Archepiscopal seat of Spain—Toledo. Here the cathedral chapter had been dominated by 'new Christians' from aristocratic and *converso* Jewish lineage.[9] In 1546 Juan Martínez Siliceo was appointed Archbishop of Toledo. Although of low origins he could boast of what very few of his chapter could—he had pure 'old Christian' Castillian blood. He was immediately in conflict with Pedro de Castilla, the Dean of the Cathedral, an aristocrat of Jewish descent. In 1547 the Archbishop refused to appoint one Fernando Jiménez to the chapter because of his Jewish ancestry, this eventually led to the Chapter adapting a statute of *limpieza de sangre* which made purity of Christian blood essential for all future appointments to the chapter (i.e. proven Christian lineage going back three generations). The Toledo statute of 1547 was quickly followed by similar statutes at other Spanish cathedrals and major religious houses. King Philip II justified his approval of the statutes with the ominous words 'All the heresies in Germany, France and Spain have been sown by the descendants of Jews' (Williams, 2004: 38). The pressure for the statutes of *limpieza* came not from the top of society (who anyway had a great deal of *converso* origins) but from the bottom. Considering the ambiguity of John's own origins, it is ironic that the religious order he joined, the Carmelites, would adopt the statutes of *limpieza de sangre* with particular rigour (see Antolín, 1987).

Therefore, the 'odd time' into which John was born in the 1540s was a time of increasing paranoia, a need for justification and fear of the influence of the Jews and the 'new heresies' of Northern Europe. Teresa of Ávila had been fortunate to have grown up in the 'little Cisnerosian spring' initiated by the reforming Franciscan Cardinal Francisco Cisneros at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries. Under his patronage the great devotional and mystical texts of the late Middle Ages were published and available for lay-people, including women, to read. Teresa, a smart young woman, took advantage of this to read deeply of these sources (See Teresa of Ávila *La Vida/The Book of the Life*: 4.7). By the time, as a mature woman and foundress of new convents, she wanted the sort of books for her nuns that she had herself had as a young woman, they had been prohibited by the Valdés Index of prohibited books in 1559 (Including Teresa's beloved *Third Spiritual Alphabet* of Francisco de Osuna, one of the key influences on her writing). This it was that spurred her into her own writing career producing the great works of mystical theology for which she is justly famed. The 'odd' climate in which John grew up in mid-sixteenth century Spain was therefore in marked contrast to that of his co-religionist Teresa who had been born some twenty seven years before him. Whether we agree with Auden or not about the 'oddness' of John's character, there is no doubting the difficulty and austerity of his early years.

Early Years

As stated, John was born in 1542 in the little village of Fontiveros on the Castillian plain.[10] He was born on the 24th June, the feast-day of St John the Baptist, so it is probable this is how he acquired his name. His father, Gonzalo de Yepes, belonged to a wealthy family of silk merchants originally from Toledo with *converso* origins. His mother, Catalina Alvarez, was from a family of poor and humble weavers whom Gonzalo met on one of his business trips to Medina del Campo in Castilla. Some commentators have speculated that she herself was from Muslim stock although Thompson (2003) questions this. Egido (1990)

points out that the genealogy of mothers was not a great preoccupation for the *linajudas* (professional genealogists intent on establishing *limpieza de sangre*) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus when she was described as 'honest and virtuous' by the early testimonies (including that of John's surviving brother Francisco) this was deemed sufficient. She came from an area of Castille known as La Moraña whose Muslim population appears to have been greater than the surrounding area. Gonzalo's family did not take kindly to his 'love match' with Catalina and promptly disowned him. As Egido points out, the usual explanation given for the *macula*—stain—of the marriage is that Catalina was from a poor background and Gonzalo wealthy. Egido and Lozano (1983), amongst others, question whether the *macula* was not perhaps more to do with the fact that Catalina was the daughter of *moriscos*—Muslims continuing to live in Spain as a separate ethnic group after the fall of Granada in 1492 and the final explusion of all *moriscos* in the early seventeenth century. Such a thesis, that John's childhood would have been influenced by *morisco* culture, ultimately manifesting itself in his own poetic lyrics and spirituality will be taken up in a Chapter Six.

The couple married in 1529 and set about establishing a family in Castilla. John was the youngest of three boys of whom only two survived, his middle brother, Luis died when John was eight. When John was three years old his father died. Catalina went to the family in Toledo and the surrounding towns begging for assistance to help bring up the boys but she was disowned by them all. Accordingly, John's earliest childhood was spent in great poverty and when he was nine the family moved to Medina del Campo so that Catalina could bring up the boys. The 1540s saw a series of bad harvests in Castilla, and the hardships the family underwent may explain Luis's early death from his deprived circumstances.

In 1553 a Royal Provision created new 'Colegios do los Niños de la Doctrina Cristiana', or *Doctrinas* as they became known, for the education of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. John enrolled at the *Doctrina* of Medina which was intended for the children of orphans and was orientated towards teaching these poor children how to develop a craft or trade that would help them in later life. Thus John was taught carpentry, tailoring, bricklaying and painting—as we have seen, the 'gloomy saint' of popular imagination remained an accomplished builder and 'brickie' for the rest of his life and some of his structures still stand to this day. A helpful antidote to the image of the otherworldly and cold ascetic!

At the age of seventeen John found employment in the Plague Hospital of *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción* where he found favour with his employer Don Alonso Alvarez who became something of a mentor and father figure to the young lad. The hospital had around fifty beds and served the poor with ulcers and contagious diseases, many of the patients suffering from the new incurable disease of syphilis which had returned from the New World with the *conquistadores*. We hear how the boy 'told stories and sang songs' to the suffering patients and it seems as though John's celebrated gifts as a gentle and sensitive pastor were developed at this early age. His duties at the hospital included collected alms for the hospital at the town fairs, churches and out in the fields for harvests. Thompson (2003) speculates that this may have been where he first heard the popular songs, traces of which would later find themselves into his own poetry.

Don Alonso saw that John had brains and encouraged him to enroll at the newly founded Jesuit College of Medina. Between 1559 and 1563 he studied metaphysics, rhetoric, grammar and Greek, Latin and Spanish literature. At this time the Jesuits were providing the very best in education in the new Renaissance humanities and John profited enormously from his education here being taught, amongst others, by the great Jesuit humanist scholar Juan Bonifacio. His classical learning and skill coming out in his later poetry and prose as we shall see later.

Don Alonso wanted John ordained so that he could serve as chaplain to the *Concepión* and accordingly paid for him to study at the University of Salamanca. However, before he did this he joined the Carmelite *Convento* of Santa Ana in Medina when he was 21 years old in 1563, taking his vows in 1564 and adopting the name of Juan de Santo Matía.

John is registered as matriculating at the University of Salamanca on 6th January 1565 and entered the Carmelite college of San Andrés at Salamanca. With Oxford, Bologna and Paris, Salamanca had been one of the four great medieval universities of Europe and again John benefited from a training in philosophy and theology second to none. His course would probably have included studies of Aristotle's *Organon, Logic, Ethics, Politics* and *Physics*. Although we do not know exactly which classes he took it is likely that, as well as philosophy and theology, he studied ethics, astronomy, grammar, logic and music.[11] He retained a great love of the natural world for his whole life and he would derive great pleasure from observation of the night sky, the planets and stars in later life.[12]

Sadly we do not have exact details of the curriculum he studied and when we come to look at the theological influences upon him at this time much detective work has to be done from the influences mentioned in his writings, this we will do in the following two chapters. However, we can state two things for certain. First that he made a study of Thomas Aquinas which is manifest in his writings and secondly that he was well versed in the writing of the so-called *theologia mystica* or 'mystical theology'. It seems he may have attended lectures by the famous Luis de León (first editor of Saint Teresa's works) but it looks unlikely that he studied Hebrew under this gifted hebraist (See Thompson, 2002: 43).

The extent to which John's works have been influenced by those of Saint Thomas is something of a moot point[13] with scholars still divided despite attempts at the beginning of the twentieth century by scholars such as Garrigou-Lagrange (1937/1958) to merge the two. As we shall see in this study there are many areas where John relies on Thomas even if he does not always quote him explicitly. Equally there are times when he diverges significantly from Thomas. Bord (1971) has pointed out, for example, that John relies more on the Augustinian anthropology of the human person divided into memory, will and understanding rather than the Thomist one of intellect and will. For Bord, John's notion of memory is not so much an Augustinian 'storehouse' of ideas as a faculty or power. Part of the reason for John's eclecticism (and originality) must lie in the fact that Salamanca itself encouraged many diverse views amongst its lecturers including Thomist, anti-Thomist, Scotist, Avicennian and Averroist views (See Crisógono, 1958: 33) thus allowing John later in life to create his own unique theological synthesis of the masters he had studied.

As regards the 'mystical theology' which we will return to in Chapter Three, we have a record that in his third year he made a detailed study of 'St Denis and St Gregory' (Crisógono, 1958: 38) which led to him writing a discourse on 'mystical theology'. We do not have this discourse. However, as we shall see later, John's study of the medieval tradition of *theologia mystica* would later bear fruits in his mature writings.

In 1567 he was ordained a priest at the age of twenty-five and due to his love of solitude, quiet and the ascetic life was seriously considering joining that most ascetic of religious orders, the Carthusians. In the same year he was appointed 'prefect of students' for San Andrés showing the esteem with which he was held by his fellow students.

However fate intervened when he returned to Medina and met the charismatic founder of the 'Discalced' reform of the Carmelites, St Teresa of Ávila. At this time Teresa was fifty-two, more than twice John's age and fresh from founding her first convent in Ávila and preparing her second foundation at Medina.[14] They immediately seemed to have had an easy spiritual rapport and Teresa persuaded John to remain in the Carmelite order and work with her to reform it from within. Calling him 'my novice' she persuaded him to begin the first male house of the reform at Duruelo near Ávila with three others. On November 28th 1568 the Carmelite Father Provincial heard the four friars renounce the Mitigated Rule of the Carmelites and embrace the Primitive Rule of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. John also now took the name for which he has become universally known—San Juan de la Cruz, Saint John of the Cross.

The School of Carmel

Ironically, the Carmelite order to which both John and Teresa would eventually belong traces its origins to the Jewish 'School of the Prophets' traditionally established by Elijah on the sides of Mount Carmel near Haifa in present-day Israel. Varied etymologies are suggested for the origins of the word including that from the words *krm* and *l* suggesting 'a vineyard', others include 'a scrubby area'. Regardless, even today it is a green verdant place that dominates the Mediterranean landscape for miles around. As well as its Jewish and Christian associations, for the Muslims it is associated with *Khidr*—'The Green One' or 'Verdant One', another name given to Elijah in this tradition. Thus the cave of Elijah, situated adjacent to the present day Carmelite Priory of 'Stella Maris' and currently a synagogue, has during its 2,500 year existence been a church, a mosque, a synagogue and possibly a Roman shrine (See: Giordano, 1995 and Florencio del Niño Jesús, 1924[15])

Carmel is frequently mentioned in the Jewish scriptures, perhaps most famously in *The Song of Songs* 7.5: 'Your head crowns you like Carmel and your flowing locks are like purple'. It is the place where Elijah performs some of the most important acts of his ministry, in particular the fight with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings, 18: 20–40), the prophecy from the cloud in the sea and his final taking up in the fiery chariot watched by Elisha (2 Kings, 2). This latter is said to have inspired the original habits of the Carmelite order which were streaked black and white to represent the cinders from the chariot scorching their robes (See Smet, 1988).

Thus, the mystical mountain maintained and maintains a pull and a power for Christian, Jewish and Muslim people alike and throughout the history of the Carmelite order the metaphors and tropes of Elijah and his mountain continue to recur: the mountain, the chariot, the raven, the fire, the cloud from the sea, the desert and the vineyard. As we shall see later John draws on this rich heritage in his own poetic use of imagery and symbol.

Historically the origins of the order are cloudy. The eleventh and twelfth centuries had seen the first significant medieval encounter between Islam and Western Christianity known as 'The Crusades' begun with the First Crusade preached by Pope Urban II in 1095 at Clermont Ferrand in France and continuing throughout the twelfth century. By the early thirteenth century we begin to hear reports of groups of former Crusaders settling on the 'Holy Mountain' near the Wadi Ain-es-Siah associated with Elijah. Thus we find Jacques de Vitry, Bishop of nearby Acre, writing around 1216: 'Others after the example and in imitation of

the holy solitary Elijah, the Prophet, lived as hermits in the beehives of small cells on Mount Carmel… near the spring which is called the Spring of Elijah' (Smet, 1988: 3). It was this disparate group of whom we know so little who approached Albert of Vercelli, Patriarch of Jerusalem, for a rule sometime between 1206 and 1214. This Rule, the original form of which is not known[16] was finally promulgated by Pope Innocent IV in his 1247 Bull *Quem honorem Conditoris*. After 1214 the fortunes of the young order underwent another twist as increasing Muslim incursions into the Christian lands around Acre had made it necessary for the group of hermits to leave the Holy Land in 1238. A General Chapter of the Order in Aylesford, Kent in 1247 eventually produced *Quem honorem Conditoris*. Thus this final version of the *Rule* holds all the contradictions and tensions that the fledgling order had experienced up to this point. In it we find the free-range hermits of the Holy Land, the small group who wanted to live as a community on the Sacred Mountain and the final manifestation of the order as a European mendicant order akin to the well established Franciscans and Dominicans. It is these tensions and contradictions that make the *Rule* such a fascinating and potentially controversial document. As Kees Waaijman puts it:

> The Rule of Carmel embodies three religious concepts: the eremitic way of life, the cenobitic form of life and life as a mendicant brother. The combination of these three concepts is not the product of careful thought but of life lived within a single century: from hermit to cenobite, from cenobite to mendicant. The tensions between these three types of religious life have internally led to conflicts, down to this day. But they have also forced the Carmelites to go below the surface, to a deeper level, to look for the mystical space of contemplation, a level from the perspective of which all forms and concepts are relative. (Waaijman, 1999: 9)

The simplicity and openness of the *Rule* contains a *nostalgie* for the fresh vistas and solitariness of the Holy Mountain of Carmel and it is to that *nostalgie* that both Teresa and John responded in their desire for 're-formation' of the Order. The 'mitigations' of 1247 included stipulations that brought the order closer to the mendicant life as then envisaged in Europe. Thus, foundations no longer needed to be made in desert places, meals were to be taken in common, the canonical office was recited and abstinence was mitigated. In the words of Joachim Smet: 'The Carmelite Rule of 1247 brought solitude to the town when life in the desert was no longer feasible… and all reforms in Carmel have always been to their contemplative origins' (Smet, 1997: 47).

It would be these tensions and contradictions in the *Rule* that would be played out in the lives of Teresa, John and the other founders of the 'Discalced Carmelites' (literally: 'shoeless').[17] Essentially their reform can be seen as a desire to emphasise the original eremitical and cenobitic element of the Carmelite life at the expense of the mendicant element (although this will remain). Thus, two of the greatest enemies that John made in the emerging reform: Fray Francisco Crisóstomo and Padre Diego Evangelista, were both rebuked by John for spending too much time preaching outside their communities and not enough in recollection. In this respect their charism seems closer to that of the mendicant Carmelites than the more eremetical Teresa and John.

Thus Duruelo, where the first friars[18] announced 'the Primitive Rule' in 1568 directly embodied the desert spirit of the first Carmelite hermits. It was 'an unknown, out-of-the-way place. Rather than a town, it amounted to an insignificant group of farmhouses' (Ruiz, 2000: 96). Even today it is still a remote place and virtually nothing remains of the original foundation. Although primitive and poor in the extreme the little hermitage of Duruelo gave John and the first companions exactly what they were looking for. Julián of Avila, a frequent visitor, wrote:

> This little house, and the other friars who began to take the habit, so stirred one's devotion that I, along with a very religious priest, named Gonzalo de Aranda, felt devoutly moved to go there on a pilgrimage by foot; and we stayed there I don't know how many days, for it seemed we were in paradise. (Ruiz, 2000: 106)

The primitive community at Duruelo would always stay close to John's heart even if, as we learn from accounts of his death bed, he vowed never to speak of it. His co-founder, Teresa, was as usual less reticent in her descriptions:

> The choir was in the garret. The centre part was sufficiently lofty to enable them to say the Hours, but they had to stoop a great deal to get in far enough to hear Mass. In the two corners nearest the church they had two small hermitages (full of hay—for the place was very cold), in which there was only room for them to lie prostrate or be seated, for the roof was almost on their heads… I knew that from the end of Matins until Prime they did not retire to their cells but remained there in prayer—for their prayer was so deep that it sometimes happened to them to go to Prime with a considerable quantity of snow on their habits and not to feel it. (Teresa of Avila, *Fundaciones*: 14)

In spring 1569 the Father Provincial raised the status of the foundation to that of a Priory with permission to receive novices and in June 1570 the community moved to Mancera de Abajo as they had become too numerous for the old farmhouse.

From Teresa's *Book of the Foundations* it is clear that she spread her reform of Carmel by embracing

already exisiting communities, *beatas*[19] and other devout souls, drawing them into her newly reformed Carmel. This is how the male branch of the reform would also often spread. Thus, whilst Teresa was making her latest foundation to the East of Madrid in Pastrana with the help of the Duke and Duchess of Éboli, she encountered two hermits—Ambrosio Mariano Azaro and Juan Narduch (after profession F. Ambrosio Mariano de San Benito and F. Juan de la Miseria). Both were from Southern Italy (Azaro from Bari and Juan from Abruzzo) and Azaro had formally been one of King Philip II's irrigation engineers.[20] These two, with the first Prior of the reform, P. Antonio de Jesús, formed the basis of the next foundation of the reform at Pastrana. Again, it is noteworthy that this second foundation again had an eremitical slant which clearly appealed to the first reformers.

Having helped in the foundation of the second house of the reform John's next commission reflected the other side of his charism and spirituality, namely, the need for intellectual balance and understanding of the spiritual life.

Pastrana was near the Renaissance University of Alcalá de Henares founded by Cardinal Cisneros at the beginning of the century. Owing to the proximity of the Pastrana community a growing number of Discalced friars were congregating at Alcalá and it was decided to establish a house of studies there for them, San Cyrilo, in 1570. John was appointed the first Rector of the college in 1571. As Crisógono comments, John 'would not again set foot in those solitary places in which the Reform had first seen the light of day' (Crisógono, 1958: 62).

At Alcalá we do not have a precise record of the form of studies that John laid down for his students, but, as with Salamanca, we can speculate that the whole of Aristotle would have been studied, including the recently edited (1568) *De Generatione* and *De Corruptione*. For John, however, it was clear that the academic life was not anti-thetical to the ascetic life and his students were encouraged to follow the life of *ascesis* at all times. 'There is plenty of study in the world', they were told by their Dominican visitor F. Pedro Fernández, 'and little of the life of penance' (Crisógono, 1958: 64). This balance of the spiritual and the intellectual would have already been familiar to John from his studies in Salamanca and something we shall return to later. Suffice it to say at this point that unlike their 'discalced' forebears among the Franciscans, the early discalced Carmelites saw no contradiction between study and the spiritual life and in fact held the two with equal respect. John would spend time in one more academic institution, at the newly founded University of Baeza. However, in his writings, as we shall see, he always maintained the necessity of balancing the *intellectus* with the *affectus*.

The Crisis

The years 1571–1578, when John reached his thirties, were perhaps the most critical in his short life. Later we shall discuss John as psychologist. As any psychologist knows the thirties are a critical period for most people, a time of mid-life transition marked by breakdown and breakthrough. Teresa had experienced her own 'mid-life breakthrough' twenty years before when she had lived through the struggles of living at the *Encarnación* in Ávila. The fruits of her struggle were the reform which was initiated in 1562 with the foundation of her first convent of the reform, San José, in Ávila.

As we have seen, John was determined to promote the eremitical element of Carmelite life following the beginning of the reform.[21] Owing, as we have seen, to the tensions inherent in the Carmelite vocation this was inevitably going to cause problems with his brethren. By 1571, a year which also saw the election of Teresa as Prioress of her old alma mater *La Encarnación* in Ávila, the reform was beginning to impact on the whole Carmelite community without any clear indication as to which direction the order was heading. In Ávila, for example, where Teresa asked John to come and live as confessor to the sisters, the Carmelite community consisted of a mixture of reformed and mitigated brothers, some of whom had renounced the mitigation and others who were in the process of doing so. This confusion was exacerbated by similar lack of direction within the ecclesiastical hierarchies of the Order itself, the Spanish hierarchy and confused instructions from Rome.

Initially Teresa's reform had met with great support from Juan Bautista Rubeo, the Prior General of the Order. Thus, in 1569, after the foundation of the house at Medina del Campo, he wrote to the sisters saying:

> (Teresa) profits the Order more than all the friars in Spain. I admonish all to obey the above-mentioned Teresa as a true superior and a jewel to be much valued as precious and a friend of God. (McGreal, 1999: 59)

However, as the need for reform was being felt across the continent (see MacCulloch, 2003) King Philip in Spain also felt the need to be involved in the reform of the three orders left untouched by previous reforms initiated by Ferdinand and Isabella and Cardinal Cisneros, that is, the Mercedarians, Trinitarians and the Carmelites. After much argument with Rome, Philip agreed in July 1564 to promulgate the Tridentine

decrees allowing the orders to reform themselves. However, as Rubeo set out to oversee the reform, Philip obtained from the new Pope Pius V what he had wanted, the right to oversee the reform through the appointment of *ordinaries* ultimately responsible to himself. As Thompson states: 'A period of conflict over the nature and extent of reform, and to whom the task should be entrusted, lasted for many years and the imprisonment of Fray Juan is part of this larger picture' (Thompson, 2003: 46).

The shambles continued until Philip proposed dissolving the whole Order in Spain and handing over its houses to more compliant Orders. In 1571 the two newly appointed Papal apostolic visitors, the Dominicans Pedro Fernández (for Castille) and F. Francisco de Vargas (for Andalusia), had taken up their posts and were undergoing visitations. The Carmelite Provincial chapter of September 1571 was told that each Mitigated house was to have a small cluster of Discalced to act as seed germs for reform. Therefore, by the time John arrived in Ávila to take up his new appointment a small group of Discalced were living in the Mitigated Priory on the Northern city walls of the town, including the Prior, P. Baltasar de Jesús, the sacristan, the procurator and the porter.

Of the two visitors, Fernández appears to have been much more subtle in his approach. Vargas in Andalucia favoured a less tactful approach, including handing over to the Discalced a Mitigated Priory (Huelva). This, and the permission for the Discalced to form new houses in Sevilla, Granada and La Peñuela, in express opposition to Rubeo's wishes, were the events that finally led to a wide desire amongst the Mitigated for a complete suppression of the Discalced.

Lack of communication, misrepresentation and misunderstanding continued. Rubeo wrote two letters to Teresa, one in October 1574 and one in January 1575, asking for an explanation of what was going on in Spain. Sadly the letters did not reach Teresa until June, by which time Rubeo had convened a General Chapter of the Order in Piacenza, Italy in May 1575. The Piacenza Chapter, taking the silence of the Reformers as an open act of defiance agreed to forbid all new Discalced foundations, ordered Teresa to 'rest' in a convent of her choice, appointed a General Visitor, P. Jerónimo Tostado to oversee the Reform of all the Order and to suppress the three Andalusian foundations made without approval of Rubeo. In Crisógono's words 'this was the signal, perhaps without anyone's being to blame, for a declaration of war among brethren' (Crisógono, 1958: 90).

On his arrival in Spain in 1576 Tostado immediately confronted King Philip and the Apostolic Nuncio, Nicolás Ormaneto. Although Tostado wanted John removed from his post at Ávila the nuns, and the Apostolic Nuncio, wanted him to stay. Meanwhile, Ormaneto confirmed Jerónimo Gracián as Vicar General for Andalucía who promptly held a first Chapter of the Discalced at Almodóvar in September 1576 which was roundly condemned by Tostado.

Ormaneto died suddenly in 1577 at the young age of 35 and was replaced by Felipe Sega who was determined that the Discalced would be brought once again under the heel of the Mitigated Friars.

Throughout all this John had been living in a small workman's hut by the side of the *Encarnación* quietly going about the business which he was so skilled at: pastoral care of the nuns entrusted to his charge, spiritual direction and a life of austere prayer and penance. In early 1576 he had been temporarily deposed by a group of Mitigated Friars and taken to Medina. Acting quickly on the appointment of Sega, John and his companion F. Germán de Santo Matías, were arrested again on the night of 2nd December 1577 and taken to the Mitigated Friary in Ávila. Thence John was conveyed by night, blindfolded, to the Mitigated Priory in Toledo to be held prisoner.

Teresa, still a 'prisoner' in Ávila, on hearing the news immeadiately wrote to King Philip:

> They are holding them prisoners in their monastery. They broke into the cells and took them and the papers they had. The whole place is highly scandalised that they should dare so much, when the place is so near where your Majesty is, it does not appear they respect either justice or God. As to me it grieves me greatly to see them in their hands. They have been longing for this for days. I should think them better off if they were among Moors, for perhaps they would have more pity. (Teresa of Ávila, Letter, 4th December 1577)

'After that Whale Swallowed me up'[22]

There is no doubt that John's time in the Carmelite prison of Toledo, an iconic nine months, was the transforming moment of his life. In retrospect it is as though his life up to then had been working towards this event. He had entered 'the belly of the whale' and was about to be transformed 'in night, in darkness, with no-one as a guide' (DN). Never in the most robust of health, it is remarkable that he survived nine months of gruelling conditions in the cell into which he was placed that December night. In fact, it probably contributed significantly to his early death at 49 in 1591.

From our (hopefully) more enlightened times the practice of groups of Christians taking one of their number and imprisoning them in a tiny cell (6ft by 10ft) which had been used recently as a latrine,

subjecting him to the discipline (whipping) and various other humiliations (having to eat his food on the floor), not allowing him a change of clothes or bathing facilities seems barbaric in the extreme. Yet daily reports from the world's conflict zones and prisons reveal that the desire for brutality, confinement and humiliation lies deep in the human psyche. John's Golgotha and Calvary in Toledo conformed to the most ancient Passion of his Sweet Saviour whom he followed 'as no other guide'.

Of the Priory itself there are no remains today, the space being occupied by the Toledo Municipal car-park. However in engravings and paintings of the day, including El Greco's famous *Vista de Toledo* in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, we can see the building, the largest Carmelite Priory of the country with approximately 80 friars, just below the old Muslim Alcazar and perched on the banks of the Tajo on some fearsome cliffs. Adjacent to it was (and still remains) the Convent of *Nuestra Señora de La Concepción*, formerly the Harem of the Muslim Vizier. This is where John remained for nine months bearing intolerable cold in winter and heat in summer, his only constant accompaniment the sounds of the river Tajo below him:

For I know well the spring that flows and runs,
although it is night.

That eternal spring is hidden,
for I know well where it has its rise,
although it is night.

I do not know its origin, nor has it one,
but I know that every origin has come from it,
although it is night.

I know that nothing else is so beautiful,
and that the heavens and the earth drink there,
although it is night.

I know well that it is bottomless
and no one is able to cross it,
although it is night.

Its clarity is never darkened,
and I know that every light has come from it,
although it is night.

I know that its streams are so brimming
they water the lands of hell, the heavens, and earth,
although it is night.

I know well the stream that flows from this spring
is mighty in compass and power,
although it is night.

I know the stream proceeding from these two,
that neither of them in fact precedes it,
although it is night.

This eternal spring is hidden
in this living bread for our life's sake,
although it is night.

It is here calling out to creatures;
and they satisfy their thirst, although in darkness,
because it is night.

This living spring that I long for,
I see in this bread of life,
although it is night.[23]

For this is where John's poetic gifts begin.

The Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, tells us that in situations of psychic disintegration and *extremis* the psyche spontaneously produces images or sym-bols that literally 'hold together' the fragmenting self. Such a process had happened to Jung himself when he suffered a severe psychotic breakdown at the outbreak of the First World War. Jung's response had been the production of what he termed *mandalas* (from the Sanskrit for 'circle') which contained a symbol of wholeness for the self comprised of circles, squares, quarternities and balance.

As Teresa sat in her Convent at Ávila struggling with the collapse of her life's work she too experienced a spontaneous form of *mandala*: the image of the 'castle or sphere of pure crystal' that 'offered itself to her' as she describes at the beginning of *Las Moradas*, 'The Interior Castle'. At a talk given shortly after his release from capture in Iraq, the Quaker peace activist Norman Kember described how he kept his sanity by drawing small pictures of English cathedrals, some of which are reproduced in his account of his capture (Kember: 2007). Likewise, we can see John's sudden outpouring of poetry as a response to the extreme situations in which he found himself. Thus, although disputed by various commentators,[24] it seems that by the end of his stay he had written first drafts of around two thirds of the poem that would later be known as *The Spiritual Canticle*, the *Romances*, the poem of *The Fountain* we quoted above and probably *The Dark Night* (See Crisógono, 1958: 108).

As regards John's treatment and conditions in the jail, as with so much in his life, we have the testimony of others who witnessed it. These were taken some thirty or forty years after the event yet in their aliveness and rawness we can still sense the power these incidents had over the people involved. Thus, in June 1616, almost forty years after the event, Juan de Santa María, John's second jailer in Toledo gave this account to the process for John's beatification in Ávila:

> During the time I was in charge, which was the latter part of his imprisonment, they brought him to the refectory three or four times, with all friars present, to receive the discipline, which they gave him with a certain severity. He never spoke, but rather bore it with patience and love. When this was over, they sent him back at once to his prison. Seeing his great patience, I felt compassion, and sometimes I opened the prison door after dinner and let him leave it to get some air in a room across from the little prison.[25]

Juan de Santa María's kindnesses to John allowed the prisoner to assess the situation and prepare for his spectacular escape one night during the Octave of the Assumption (ie. the week after 15th August) 1578. It seems as though during his recreation time he had managed to loosen the screws in the outside padlock and measure the distance from the belvedere window of the friary to the city walls below. In traditional fashion he ripped up his blankets, tied them together and with a lamp hook affixed them to the wooden base of the belvedere window.[26] With this he let himself down, jumping the last few feet to find himself on the city wall just above the rocks of the Tajo. From here he crept along the city walls and jumped down, only to find himself in the garden of the convent of the *Concepción* next door. Tired and weak as he was he managed to scrabble out of the convent and made his way through the streets of Toledo to the Arco de la Sangre and the Zocodover. Although he avoided detection he happened to find a knight on his way to bed who gave him permission to rest in the entrance of his palace until daybreak. In the early hours he finally found his way to the Discalced sisters' convent off the Calle de la Sillería.

Again, we have the testimony of the sisters who received him that night and they describe how appalling he looked when he arrived. The prioress, Ana de los Ángeles, quickly grasped the severity of the situation and had John hidden in the convent just in time before the Mitigated brothers came looking for him. In answer to their enquiries the wily Sister Isabel de San Jerónimo on the turnkey replied 'it would be a miracle if you were to see any friar here', 'thus', as M. Constanza de la Cruz, a novice at the time, states in her deposition: 'answering them excellently, without lying, but leaving them puzzled as to whether the nuns had seen any religious' (See Allison Peers, 1943: III.343). Ana de los Ángeles thought it unwise for John to spend the night in the church and by means of secret messages got John transferred to the Hospital of Santa Cruz under the direction of Pedro González de Mendoza, Canon of the Cathedral and Administrator of the Hospital (and also from another family with Toledan *converso* pedigree).

John was to spend six weeks in the beautiful Renaissance palace of Santa Cruz, now a magnificent municipal art gallery of Toledo. From here he would have had a clear view of the Mitigated friary, the garden of the *Concepción* and his escape route through the Arco de la Sangre. Interestingly enough, as John recuperated in Santa Cruz through the late summer days of 1578, Doménikos Theotokópoulos, better known as 'El Greco', almost an exact contemporary of John's (born in 1541), was resident in Toledo and just celebrating the birth of his son Jorge Manuel. It is the job of artists to speculate about an imaginary meeting that may have occurred between these two great artists of the divine life.

With two of Mendoza's servants John was able to escape to Andalucía stopping on the way to attend another Council of the reform in Almodóvar in October. From here he made his way to Beas and El Calvario

in the remote landscape of the Sierra de Cazorla. Surrounded by nature and in the glorious beauty of the Andalusian spring John could at last begin to recover and apply his gifts to expanding the poems written whilst in prison and their commentaries. As we have seen, of these four have survived: two on the poem *The Dark Night*: one now called *The Dark Night of the Soul* and the other *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*; and ones on *The Living Flame of Love* and the poem that begins *¿Adonde te escondiste Amado, y me dejaste con gemido?/'Where have you hidden Beloved, and left me moaning?'* and now called *The Spiritual Canticle*. Two other works are mentioned in the testimonials of which neither has survived. Madre Isabel de la Encarnación mentions seeing 'a small treatise of his called *Qualities of the Bird in Solitary Flight*' (See Crisógono, 1958: 224) and reference is made to a work written in La Peñuela: *The Miracles of the Images of Guadalcázar*. There are reports of John destroying works before his second arrest in Ávila and, towards the end of his life when he was persecuted again, it is not unreasonable to suppose these latter works were deliberately destroyed for being too provocative.[27]

Andalucía

On his first arrival in Andalucía John was extremely weak and unable to concentrate. We have a moving account of his first days spent with the Discalced sisters at Beas. One of the first things the sisters did was to sing him some songs to give him fortitude. Francisca de la Madre de Dios described the effect of their songs on him many years later in the *Depositions*:

> When the holy Fray John of the Cross heard these words being sung,[28] he was profoundly moved and carried out of himself in sorrow because he had not known enough suffering to have knowledge of good things. This caused him so much pain that many tears began to flow. With one hand he held on to the grille, and with the other he motioned to the nuns to stop singing. (Ruiz, 2000: 192)

This time in Andalucía also saw a flowering of one of the other key relationships in John's life. John had first met the redoubtable Ana de Jesús shortly after the reform had begun in Castilla. Now they were to meet again as she was the Prioress of the new foundation of Beas to which John was attached as confessor. At first the lowly friar did not make much of an impression on the competent prioress who wrote to Teresa asking for another confessor. Teresa immeadiately replied back:

> I am really surprised, daughter, at your complaining so unreasonably, when you have Padre Fray Juan de la Cruz with you, who is a divine, heavenly man. I can tell you, daughter, that since he went away I have found no one like him in all Castille nor anyone who inspires people with so much fervour on their way to heaven… He is indeed the father of my soul and one of those with whom it does me most good to have converse. (Teresa of Ávila, letter 261, trans. Allison Peers)

Ana was duly rebuked and slowly the extrovert Castillian began to appreciate and discover the hidden depths of the quiet man. John wrote and dedicated the commentary to *The Spiritual Canticle* to Ana and she would go on to promote and defend *La Madre*'s work extending the reform to France and the Low Countries from whence the reform spread to the English-speaking world (See Wilson, 2006).

The relative peace of John's time in Andalucía which included his work at Beas, Baeza and latterly as Prior of the Carmel of Los Mártires in the Alhambra, Granada, coincided with the final approval of the independence of the Discalced with Pope Gregory XIII's Apostolic Letter of June 1580 *Pia consideratione*. This permitted the Discalced to appoint their own superiors and form their own communities independent of the mitigated friars and sisters and they responded with their first formal Provincial Meeting in Alcalá in 1581 just a year before Teresa's death in Alba de Tormes. During these peaceful years John was able to complete his great poem and commentary *The Living Flame of Love*[29] and the final stanzas and commentary on *The Spiritual Canticle*.

The first official chapter of the Reform occurred in 1588 at Madrid at which the Genovese friar Nicolás Doria was appointed Vicar General and John was appointed First Definitor and Prior of Segovia. Of all houses associated with John to this day perhaps Segovia is the one that still seems to enshrine his spirit. When he moved there in August 1588 the friars had already been living there for two years in the old Trinitarian monastery beside the river Eresma. There in that little corner of paradise surrounded by the Hieronymite monastery of El Parral, the old crusader church of *La Vera Cruz*, the Marian shrine of *La Fuencisla*, the crags and hermitages which John so loved and the magnificent view of the Alcazar, Cathedral and city of Segovia John's spirit could breath and he could complete his literary tasks.

The other great delight of returning to Castilla was to be near his beloved brother Francisco again. The two brothers would often meet and Francisco would spend much time at the friary. From this period we have the wonderful report that whilst in conversation the two of them had a vision of their beloved mother, Catalina, who had passed away some eight years earlier, in glory with two of Francisco's children who had

also died young.

As at Granada, John put his old skills of bricklaying, carpentry and masonry to good use to help in the construction of the new friary, constructions which still stand to this day.

Final Years

John's peaceful time in Segovia was not to last however. As mentioned earlier, as the reform had grown John had always stressed the need for balance between the eremitical, cenobitic and mendicant lives. Some of his fellow friars tended to lean towards one or other extreme, two having already been mentioned: Fray Francisco Crisóstomo and Padre Diego Evangelista, both of whom had been rebuked by John for spending too much time on the road and preaching whilst he was Vicar General for Andalucía. Unfortunately for John, both of these would in his final years occupy positions of power with respect to his own.

The conditions for John's final act were laid in the General Chapter of 1591 presided over by Nicolás Doria. In the previous year changes had been proposed to the governance of the Discalced sisters which would make them more bound to their Discalced brothers. At a meeting in Madrid with Doria, Ana de Jesús, now Prioress of Madrid had rebuked Doria's proposals suggesting 'I am afraid the fathers of the Consulta will change many things in the laws and Constitutions which our Mother-Foundress left us. Let your reverence not consent to it, for we see by experience how satisfactory things are in these houses when we keep that which our Holy Mother left us' (Crisógono, 1985: 271). John, as would be expected, took Ana de Jesús's side against Doria, as with Doria's treatment of Gracián, the other besetting problem of the time. The consequence of this difference of opinion was that in the General Chapter of 1591 John was not reappointed as Definitor being replaced by his old enemy Diego Evangelista. For the first time John, to his delight, had no office and could once again devote himself to his own prayers and spiritual progress. To this end he returned to La Peñuela on the Sierra Morena. As John remained in his isolation there Diego Evangelista whipped up a vicious campaign of defamation against John with the intention of having him removed from the Order—the very order which he had founded!

During this process in September 1591 John became ill and was moved from La Peñuela to Ubeda in Andalusia where he was not greatly loved. Unfortunately for John the Prior was the aforementioned Francisco Crisóstomo who rather vindictively assigned him an unpleasant cell and refused to give him special treatment. As in his treatment at the hands of the friars in Toledo, John again bore this latest and last humiliation with fortitude and equanimity. Crisóstomo's indifference to John's suffering led to him even refusing John a change of bandages as the pus in his leg and back welled up in cupfuls.

The disease spread to his back where a tumour appeared. On 13th December he called Crisóstomo to his bedside and begged forgiveness for the expense he had incurred the priory. Crisóstomo was overcome and fled the cell in tears.[30] He died later that night. After some struggle his relics were mostly returned to Segovia where they remain to this day.

He remained a controversial figure for the next 150 years and although a process for beatification was begun in the early seventeenth century it was not until 1726 that he was canonised as a saint of the Roman Catholic Church, and then not without controversy.

He was made a Doctor of the Universal Church in 1926, an honour he shares with his old co-worker St Teresa, the first woman Doctor of the Church.

2

John the Theologian

'Where have you hidden, Beloved?'
The Spiritual Canticle (CB.1)

One of the central arguments of this book is that John of the Cross can best be understood as an 'outstanding Christian thinker' in many fields: as a psychologist, mystic, artist and someone who allows Christianity to dialogue with other faiths. However before we explore these aspects of the 'myriad minded man' it is necessary to say something about how John works as a theologian. As a Christian writer John's whole work and thought-world takes place within the context and reality of God's work in people's lives as manifest in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without understanding this context, elaborated in this chapter, we will not begin to make sense of the journey John invites his readers to embark upon.

The first thing to say, however, is that if we try and find in John the work of a systematic or dogmatic theologian we will be disappointed. As we have seen in the previous chapter and will discuss here, although John is thoroughly trained in the scholastic writings of the mid-sixteenth century his approach and style of theology is anything but staid and predictable, rather his innovations in understanding Christian doctrine and life make his writings as relevant to today's world as ever.

Although in his writings John covers all the main traditional areas of Christian theology, that is the mystery of the revelation of God, the nature and following of Christ, the overflow of God's love into creation as the Holy Spirit and the final call to participation in the life of the Triune God, his theology is unusual by virtue of its starting place. It does not start with a biblical pronouncement or indeed a Church doctrine, but rather it starts with a terrible cry of desolation, a wound:

Where have you hidden,
My love, and left me moaning?
Like a stag you fled
having wounded me;
I went out calling you, and you had gone.

And all who are free,
Tell me a thousand graceful things of you;
And all wound me more,
and leave me dying:
A-don't-know-what which lies behind their babbling.

Why, if you wounded this heart
Don't you heal it?
And as you stole it from me,
Why do you leave it as it is
and not carry off what you have stolen?

'The Spiritual Canticle' (CB) 1,7,9 (my translation)

This strange and terrible cry at once makes John's theology so appealing and so unusual. His is not a theology built on abstract theories of divinity but rather the ordinary flesh and blood lives of mortals. As we saw in the previous chapter, his own hard upbringing and the difficult circumstances of his life no doubt contributed to this. However this was combined and tempered by the desire to make the Christian way accessible and open to all. We hear many times in the accounts of his life of how he made the scriptures accessible to those in the Carmel and beyond and this accessibility is one of the secrets of the power of his

theology. Although John has about a dozen citations of non-scriptural works in his writings he has over 1,500 biblical quotations in all and he constantly uses biblical themes, metaphors and ideas to illustrate his points (See Ruiz, 1986: 73 and Matthew, 1991: 81).

His theology then begins with a wound, the sense somehow that God has left us, a sense of dissatisfaction or failure. Somehow we are imperfect and what we seek cannot be found. This is a 'holy wound' that lies at the heart of all human life. I believe one of the reasons for John's renewed appeal to this generation is that once again we are understanding that at the heart of the contemporary world there lies a deep festering and painful spiritual wound. Many commentators have talked about it, for example Richard Rohr, Henri Nouwen and Robert Johnson (See Nouwen, 1979, Johnson, 1997, 1998, Rohr, 2005). Robert Johnson, the American psychologist, finds his inspiration for his account of this phenomenon from the ancient Celtic Christian legend of the Grail. At the heart of this legend lies the 'Fisher King' who at an early age receives a mysterious wound which causes the whole Grail Castle and the land around to fester and wither away.[31] This wound, in the legend, was received at an early age by the King as a young man in the forest. Johnson interprets this event as the first experience all people have of the transcendent at a young age, at the early age when most people receive their first taste of the transcendent they are too young or unformed to cope with the experience and integrate it into their lives. This leads to the 'Fisher King Wound' which remains with them throughout their lives. Most Western people, writes Johnson, are 'Fisher Kings'. Each of them:

> Has blundered into something that is too big for them. They proceed halfway through their development and then drop it as being too hot. Often a certain bitterness arises, because, like the Fisher King, they can neither live with the new consciousness they have touched nor can they entirely drop it. (Johnson, 1997: 4)[32]

So it is that four hundred years earlier we find John also beginning his theological journey with this deep spiritual wound:

> This feeling is so strong because in the love-wound that God produces in the soul, the affection of the will rises with sudden rapidity toward the possession of the Beloved, whose touch was felt. Just as quickly, she feels his absence and the impossibility of possessing him here as she wants. And together with this feeling, she then experiences 'moaning' over his absence. (CB 1.19)

From this wound arises John's first theological point as expressed in *The Spiritual Canticle*:

> It is noteworthy that, however elevated God's communications and the experiences of his presence are, and however sublime a person's knowledge of him may be, these are not God essentially, nor are they comparable to him because, indeed, he is still hidden to the soul. Hence, regardless of all these lofty experiences, a person should think of him as hidden and seek him as one who is hidden, saying: 'Where have You hidden?' (CB 1.3)

This 'hiddenness' of God, the *deus absconditus*, is a lodestone for much of John's theology. God will always be beyond our imaginings. Out of this arises much talk of John as 'mystic' and this is a topic we shall return to in the following chapter. Also arising from this theological position is what can be termed John's 'suspicion of charismata' ie. his hermeneutical scepticism when it comes to gifts of the Spirit such as consolations, visions, locutions etc. A subject we shall again return to in Chapter Six below.

Throughout John's account of 'the wound' there remains paradox. In a passage that reflects the *Felix Culpa* of the Catholic Easter Hymn, the *Exultet*,[33] John declares in *The Living Flame of Love*:

> O happy wound, wrought by one who knows only how to heal!
> O fortunate and choicest wound; you were made only for delight, and the quality of your affliction is delight and gratification for the wounded soul! You are great, O delightful wound, because he who caused you is great! And your delight is great because the fire of love is infinite and makes you delightful according to your capacity and greatness. (LF 2.8)

Having encountered the hiddenness of God, the divine wound or discontent our response, according to John, is to 'go out':

Seeking my Love
I will head for the mountains and for watersides,
I will not gather flowers,
nor fear wild beasts;
I will go beyond strong men and frontiers. (CB 3)

One dark night,
fired with love's urgent longings
- ah, the sheer grace!-
I went out unseen,

my house being now all stilled.

In darkness, and secure,
by the secret ladder, disguised,
- ah, the sheer grace! -
in darkness and concealment,
my house being now all stilled.

On that glad night,
in secret, for no one saw me,
nor did I look at anything,
with no other light or guide
than the one that burned in my heart.

This guided me
more surely than the light of noon
to where he was awaiting me
- him I knew so well -
there in a place where no one appeared. (DN 1)

We leave the place of comfort 'unseen' to find this strange hidden God who has given us such trouble by wounding us. This process John terms 'the dark night' and it is the point where we realise we cannot proceed any further by our own means but need the help of God. Teresa of Ávila in her *Moradas* uses the scripture passage of the rich young man (Mark, 10: 17–26) to make the same point, turning the 'third mansion' of her book into an extended meditation on this point:

> A person has plenty to eat and even a surplus; the opportunity presents itself for him to acquire more wealth: all right, let him do so if it is offered to him. But if he strives for wealth and after possessing it strives for more and more, however good the intention may be (for he should have a good intention because, as I have said, these are virtuous persons of prayer), he need have no fear of ascending to the dwelling places closer to the King. (Teresa of Ávila, *Las Moradas* 3.2.4)

In the case of John, for the 'dark night' to happen there need to be certain circumstances in evidence: first, a sense of our own bewilderment and disorientation. This is a place of complete overwhelming: it is what John describes in the passage from the *Canticle* on the 'strange islands':

> Strange islands are surrounded by water and situated across the sea, far withdrawn and cut off from communication with others. Many things very different from what we have here are born and nurtured in these islands; these things are of many strange kinds and powers never before seen by humans, and they cause surprise and wonder in anyone who sees them. Thus, because of the wonderful new things and the strange knowledge (far removed from common knowledge) that the soul sees in God, she calls him 'strange islands.' … His ways, counsels, and works are very strange and new and wonderful to humans. (CB 14/15.8)

As he comments:

> Inasmuch as the soul in this case is united with God, she feels that all things are God, as St. John experienced when he said: *That which was made, in him was life*. It should not be thought that what the soul is said to feel here is comparable to seeing things by means of the light, or creatures by means of God; rather in this possession the soul feels that God is all things for her. Neither must it be thought that, because the soul has so sublime an experience of God, we are asserting that she has essential and clear vision of him. This experience is nothing but a strong and overflowing communication and glimpse of what God is in himself. CB 14/15.5

The second theological condition for John's 'Dark Night' is the 'Inflow of God'. As John tells us in the *Living Flame of Love*, the Christian God is an inflowing God and where there is a crack or a space God will flow in. John's theology is completely dynamic and at any moment both the lover (us) and the beloved (God) are in constant motion seeking each other:

O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united
the Lover with his beloved,
transforming the beloved in her Lover. (DN 1)

Thus, we have in John's theological anthropology a basic systole and diastole between God's irresistible loving action towards us and our opening ourselves up and preparing ourselves for God's action on us and in our lives. 'It should be known', writes John in *The Living Flame*, 'that if anyone is seeking God, the Beloved is seeking that person much more' (LF 3.28). In that poem our response to God's love is compared to 'deep caverns of feeling' and that our role as Christians is to prepare ourselves for the 'sweet cautery' of God's action in our lives which will come if we allow ourselves to receive it:

> The soul, then, should advert that God is the principal agent in this matter. He acts as guide of the blind, leading it by the hand to the place it knows not how to reach (to supernatural things of which neither its intellect nor will nor memory can know the nature). It should use all its principal care in watching so as not to place any obstacle in the way of God, its guide on this road ordained for it by him according to the perfection of his law and of the faith. (LF 3.29)

Out of this arises one of John's more idiosyncratic classifications: that between what he calls the 'active' night and the 'passive' night. By the former he refers to all our own efforts to seek God: that is, the motion of the lover towards the Beloved, by the latter he refers to all God's action to seek us: the motion of the Beloved towards the lover. We shall see later how John suggests we should instinctively trust the latter rather than the former, ie. we should have a hermeneutic of suspicion with regard to our own actions in the service of God and, on the contrary, a more open attitude of gratitude and credibility when God acts in our lives in totally gratuitous and unexpected ways.

Throughout his writings, then, John is constantly encouraging us to practise emptiness in our dealings with God: emptying the caverns of the heart, in anticipation and preparation for the searing presence of the Beloved:

> When the soul frees itself of all things and attains to emptiness and dispossession concerning them, which is equivalent to what it can do of itself, it is impossible that God fail to do his part by communicating himself to it, at least silently and secretly. It is more impossible than it would be for the sun not to shine on clear and uncluttered ground. As the sun rises in the morning and shines on your house so that its light may enter if you open the shutters, so God, who in watching over Israel does not doze or, still less, sleep, will enter the soul that is empty, and fill it with divine goods. (LF 3.46)

The danger, of course, is to imagine from this that the life of the Christian is relatively straightforward: we simply make our homes for Christ and he will automatically come and make everything cosy for us. However, John is adamant that this is not the case. The way is hard and the price is high. The spiritual purging is a painful one: *O Sweet Cautery!* (LF), and ultimately all in us 'much that is good and true' must die. For John, fear, disturbance and pain are not an occasional add-on to Christian life but may indeed be at the very heart of it, here is where we enter the true mystery of the Cross which lies at the heart of all John's theology.

To enable us, then, to cope with this deep and basic transformation of our human personality as we are invited into the deepest possible participation in the life of the Triune God, John emphasises the role of the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love to guide us 'along the path we know not' (A 2.24.8). For John 'the more faith the soul has, the greater her union with God will be' (A 3.7.2). Once again, he is back to his favourite theme, do not long for or desire 'spiritual gifts and consolations', rather it is faith—the faith at midnight—which will ultimately be the surest guide that will lead us where we want to go. At the centre of our lives must be faith in Jesus Christ, this alone will be our surest guide (A 2.27.4).

John, as we shall see later, uses a scholastic terminology when referring to theological anthropology. Thus, the human person is divided into three functions of memory, will and understanding. As faith corresponds to the knowing part of the person, so likewise, the second theological virtue, hope, corresponds to the memory. For John, hope can serve the person by healing painful memories and allow us to move from the blocks of the past to deepen our present moment relationship with God (A 3.6.3). For Iain Matthew, 'John only knows two realities: the present and eternity' (1995: 107). So the theological virtue of hope stretches or points the Christian from the present moment to our ultimate eschatological goal—union with Christ in the Trinity, which then leads to the role of the third theological virtue, love. For John the essential characteristic of love, which acts on the Will, is to *transform* the self:

> O guiding night!
> O night more lovely than the dawn!
> O night that has united
> the Lover with his beloved,
> transforming the beloved in her Lover. (DN 1)

The ultimate test of love for John is its ability to transform the person:

> What God seeks, he being himself God by nature, is to make us gods through participation, just as fire converts all things into fire. (*Sayings* 106, see also DN 2.13.9, CB 12.7, 28.1, 32.6)

By loving God, says John, we are inevitably changed. Love for John effects a likeness between the lover and the object loved (A 1.4.3) so by loving God we inevitably will become like God. Or, as he poetically puts it, the old log of wood will eventually *become* flame after the fire has entered it (LF: Prol.3).

Role of Jesus Christ in John's Spiritual Anthropology

Several writers have noted that John's theology can be seen as not particularly Christocentric. Karl Rahner, for example, in the *Theological Investigations* (Rahner, 1967: 2:42) sees John's contemplation as firstly theistic or pantheistic and secondly Christian. As Iain Matthew points out (Matthew, 1991: 179) the word *Jesús* only occurs four times in all John's longer works, although *Cristo* and *Hijo* (son) occur more frequently.

This fact has caused some problems with commentators and may account for some of the resistance to John's beatification and canonisation in the eighteenth century referred to earlier. However as we become more familiar with John's writings we see that they are completely permeated with Christ and, more importantly, concerned with detailing how a Christian goes about deepening their relationship with Christ in this life. For, as John says in *The Ascent*: 'I can see that Christ is very little known by those who think themselves his friends' (A 2.7.12).

Drawing on writers such as Matthew (See Matthew, 1991, 1995), we can make the following points about John's relationship to Christ in his writings:

1 That we should see John not so much as expounding a credal statement but inviting us into the *Nada/Todo* relationship to God that we discussed above. This, for John, is the essential nature of our relationship with Christ and is the saint's way of expressing it.

2 That John rarely addresses Christ as 'Jesus'. Rather he prefers all the beautiful, poetic and fascinating names that permeate his writings (especially the *Spiritual Canticle*) including brother, shepherd, health, ransom, medicine, mountain goat, stag, lion, garden, fountain, rock, mine, well, lily, light, prisoner and nightingale (see Matthew, 1995: 117). Of all these terms, *Bridegroom* and *Beloved* are his favourite names for Christ, and these occur around 550 times in his writings.

3 As with Teresa of Ávila, it is important to remember that John's writings were primarily written for the Spanish Carmelite friars and nuns of his time. They (like John) would have been completely immersed in the continual liturgy and devotion to Christ (again, any visit to these Convents today will confirm the abundance of Christocentric imagery and devotion in these places). This context would have been assumed by John and presumably assumed in his readers. Only since the writings have come to the attention of those outside the Christian tradition do problems in Christocentric referencing arise.

4 As stated above, the Paschal Mystery is at the heart of John's theology. His Christ is primarily leading us to the Passion where we will encounter not only the heart of Christ but also our own existential heart. The Cross is central to all John's theology and without an appreciation of the Cross his theology makes no sense. John quotes with approval in *The Ascent*: 'If anyone wishes to follow my way, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his soul will lose it, but whoever loses it for me will gain it' (Mark, 8: 34–5 in A 2.7.4). For John:

> A genuine spirit seeks rather the distasteful in God than the delectable, leans more toward suffering than toward consolation, more toward going without everything for God than toward possession, and toward dryness and affliction than toward sweet consolation. It knows that this is the significance of following Christ and denying self. (A 2.7.5)

On the Christian journey, states John, there is room only 'for self denial and the cross':

> If individuals resolutely submit to the carrying of the cross, if they decidedly want to find and endure trial in all things for God, they will discover in all of them great relief and sweetness. (A 2.7.7)

5 As will be stated throughout this book, John's approach to life can be put simply in the following phrase: 'A person makes progress only by imitating Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life' (A 2.7.8). The *imitatio Christi* is at the heart of John's teaching and really he sees no other way to progress through life. This *imitatio Christi* will inevitably bring us to Golgotha and Calvary and cannot be escaped:

> Those who are truly spiritual might understand the mystery of the door and way (which is Christ) leading to union with God, and that they might realize that their union with God and the greatness of the work they accomplish will be measured by their annihilation of themselves for God in the sensory and spiritual parts of their souls. When they

> are reduced to nothing, the highest degree of humility, the spiritual union between their souls and God will be an accomplished fact. This union is the most noble and sublime state attainable in this life. The journey, then, does not consist in consolations, delights, and spiritual feelings, but in the living death of the cross, sensory and spiritual, exterior and interior. (A 2.7.11)

As we shall see later in the book these strong statements of John have themselves been open to much misinterpretation and the strong doctrine presented in these passages from the *Ascent* must be taken within the context of his whole writing, much of which will be elaborated during this book. For John, the following of Christ is not just about adopting some 'benign ethics' (Matthew, 1995: 133) but rather about 'allowing Jesus to work out his dying and rising' in our lives. It is the sheer existential strength of John's commitment to following Christ (so strongly expressed in the passages above) that makes his teaching too strong for many Christians. Yet, if we read his writing with openness, sympathy and understanding we cannot but help realise, I believe, that he is one of the great Christian writers to get to the heart of what it means to follow Christ in this life.

However, before ending these reflections on the role of Christ in John's theology it is important to note that the Christ of St John of the Cross is not just the Christ of the Cross. Christ portrayed in the *Spiritual Canticle* and *The Romances*, for example, is the Christ Pantocrator: the Christ of Creation who is found in all creation. As we saw in the previous chapter John was very fond of taking his novices and students out into the beauty of the Spanish countryside, by day or night, to find the wonders of God in His Creation. In *The Canticle* John begins, as we have seen, with the wound and the importance of self-knowledge, however, he soon moves from this to the Christ of Creation:

> On this spiritual road the consideration of creatures is first in order after the exercise of self-knowledge. The soul thereby advances in the knowledge of God by considering his greatness and excellence manifested in creatures, as is brought out in that passage of St. Paul: The invisible things of God are known by the soul through creatures, both visible and invisible. (CB 4.1)

In our ecologically aware age, John's 'interrogation' of 'the elements and other inferior creatures, on the heavens together with the other material things in them that God created, and also on the heavenly spirits' rings true for us today. For John, as we have seen, God's glory can be seen in all things: nature, rocks, the stars and planets, water, earth, air and fire. As he states:

> The Church likewise uses the word 'green' to express heavenly things. In praying to God for the souls of the faithful departed, she says, speaking to them: *Constituat vos Dominus inter amoena virentia*, which means: May God set you in delightful green places. (CB 4.5)[34]

Christ for John is not only Christ of the Cross but also Christ the Word Incarnate, Pantocrator and Universal Mediator. We might also want to go further and see John's Christ as the 'Cosmic Christ' so beloved by twentieth century commentators such as Raimundo Pannikar and Bede Griffiths (See, for example, Griffiths, 1992).

John, the Holy Spirit and the Trinity

Just as there is a richness and subtlety to John's account of Christ so there is likewise a great poetic and theological depth in his accounts of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit, as described in *The Spiritual Canticle*, is primarily for John the bringer of *delight (deleites)* and *love* (see CB 17). In the following chapter we shall return to the importance of 'the epistemology of delight' for him. Suffice it to say at this point that it noteworthy that for John one of the primary criteria for the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity and with ourselves is *delight* and the experience thereof in our souls when touched by the Spirit of God.

The second point that John emphasises with respect to the Holy Spirit is that 'the bride does not say "breathe into my garden" but "breathe through my garden"' (CB 17.5). John is at pains to point out that 'there is a considerable difference between God's breathing into the soul and his breathing through the soul'. Here we are back again with John's Thomist formation; he is emphasising that the Holy Spirit does not bring new gifts into the soul but rather the Holy Spirit touches and puts in motion:

> The virtues and perfections already given, renewing and moving them in such a way that of themselves they afford the soul a wonderful fragrance and sweetness, as when you shake aromatic spices and they spread their abundant fragrance that before this was neither so strong nor so highly perceptible. (CB 17.5)

The grace of the Holy Spirit, for John, builds on the nature of our faculties, releasing and enabling what is already there rather than creating something new. This is a constant theme throughout John's writing and

one to which we will return when we look at John's spiritual anthropology in Chapters Four and Six. The whole argument of the *Spiritual Canticle* is that the Holy Spirit's action on us, and our actions in life through following Christ, lead to the *re-ordering* of our natural faculties so that we are prepared for the final union with God. The faculties are not destroyed or re-created but re-orientated so that they are pointing once again to God. For John, the aim of human life is to bring back right relationship into our lives, especially with regard to our disordered faculties and senses. God, for John, 'does not make rubbish'; all we have is precious in God's eyes (as is all creation) and not one hair of it will be lost as all is redirected and returned to its rightful source in God:

> By means of the Holy Spirit, who prepares the dwelling, these virtues delight the Son of God so that through them he may feed more on the love of the soul. This is characteristic of the Bridegroom: to unite himself with the soul amid the fragrance of these flowers. (CB 17.10)

The Holy Spirit, for John, creates the conditions in which the Beloved, Christ can enter the soul and so transform the self for union with the Divine. In *The Living Flame of Love* the Holy Spirit is a mighty and powerful 'cautery' which sweeps through the self to effect transformation:

> This flame of love is the Spirit of its Bridegroom, who is the Holy Spirit. The soul feels him within itself not only as a fire that has consumed and transformed it but as a fire that burns and flares within it, as I mentioned. And that flame, every time it flares up, bathes the soul in glory and refreshes it with the quality of divine life. Such is the activity of the Holy Spirit in the soul transformed in love: The interior acts he produces shoot up flames, for they are acts of inflamed love, in which the will of the soul united with that flame, made one with it, loves most sublimely. (LF 1.3)

The effect of the Holy Spirit on the soul for John is to produce 'splendours' *(resplandores)* that are neither the effect of the soul alone or the Holy Spirit alone, but a wonderful divine cooperation between the two:

> These flames and their activity are the happy fiestas and games (*los juegos y fiestas alegres*) that the Holy Spirit inspires in the soul… It seems in these that he is always wanting to bestow eternal life and transport it completely to perfect glory by bringing it into himself. All the gifts, first and last, great and small, that God grants to the soul, he always grants in order to lead it to eternal life. (LF 3.10)

The action of the Holy Spirit on the soul for John is to lead the soul to *los juegos y fiestas alegres* of our life with God. This is the other side of John's teaching that must always be held in balance with the harshness and pain of the *Dark Night*. Throughout our journey through his teaching it is important that we bear in mind John is always presenting the paradox of an encounter with God which is at the same time the most painful yet the most joyous and playful possible. God is always for John the divine lover and player as well as the initiator into the darkest mysteries of existence.

John and Mary

Before concluding this chapter with John's views on the theological end of human life it is worth rehearsing his views on the role of the Virgin Mary in his theology.

From the accounts of the depositions for the beatification of John there are no shortage of references to the presence of the Virgin Mary in his life. There are at least three miraculous interventions of the Virgin to save the life of the young boy and various testimonials recount how the Virgin was involved with John's somewhat miraculous escape from the Toledo prison (See, for example, the *Depositions* of F. Alonso de la Madre de Dios in *Obras* ed P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, Vol. 5: 364–411). Martín de la Asunción tells us:

> He was very devoted to Our Lady and every day recited the Office of Our Lady on his knees, even when he was journeying. All his instructions and conversations treated of the Blessed Sacrament and the Most Holy Virgin and he frequently sang hymns to Our Lady (*Obras*, 84–88)

The clearest sign, of course, of John's devotion to the Blessed Virgin was his decision to enter the Order of 'the Most Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel'. As numerous witnesses attest John died on the Saturday of the Octave of the *Immaculata* and asked to be buried 'in the habit of the Virgin'. As he heard the pealing of the bells for matins in the nearby convent of Madre Dios his last words to his companions were that he would 'sing Matins that morning with Our Lady in heaven' (See Bengoechea, 2000: 918).

Despite his obvious great devotion to the Virgin there are only twenty-two references in all to her in his writings. However, as with Jesus, the lack of direct references does not detract from her importance in his theology. John's most striking reference to the Blessed Virgin is in A 3.2.10 where he sees her as the model of Christian contemplation and the ideal 'pneumatological person' from the perspective we developed above: 'she never had the form of any creature impressed in her soul, nor was she moved by any, for she

was always moved by the Holy Spirit'. Other writers such as Gregorio de Jesús Crucificado have wanted to ascribe to the Virgin's assumption the sort of '*muerte de amor*' described by John (See Gregorio de Jesús Crucificado, 1950: 260–267).

The End of the Journey

For John the end of all human life is expressed as 'the high caverns' in 'The Spiritual Canticle', where:

> The high caverns of this rock are the sublime, exalted, and deep mysteries of God's wisdom in Christ, in the hypostatic union of the human nature with the divine Word, and in the corresponding union of human beings with God, and the mystery of the harmony between God's justice and mercy with respect to the manifestations of his judgments in the salvation of the human race (CB 37.3)

The end of human life is the ecstatic union with God so eloquently described in *The Living Flame*:

> The death of such persons is very gentle and very sweet, sweeter and more gentle than was their whole spiritual life on earth. For they die with the most sublime impulses and delightful encounters of love, resembling the swan whose song is much sweeter at the moment of death. Accordingly, David affirmed that the death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord. The soul's riches gather together here, and its rivers of love move on to enter the sea, for these rivers, because they are blocked, become so vast that they themselves resemble seas. The just one's first treasures, and last, are heaped together as company for the departure and going off to the kingdom, while praises are heard from the ends of the earth, which, as Isaiah says, are the glory of the just one. (LF 1.30)

Or again, in one of the final passages from *The Spiritual Canticle* where Christ's message is memorably compared to the song of the nightingale which beckons the soul to eternal life:

> Just as the nightingale begins its song in the spring, once the wintery cold, rain, and changes have passed, and provides melody for the ear and refreshment for the spirit, so in this actual communication and transformation of love that the bride has now attained in this life, in which she is freed from and protected against all temporal disturbances and changes, and divested and purged of imperfections, penalties, and clouds in the senses and the spirit, she feels a new spring in spiritual freedom and breadth and gladness. She hears the sweet voice of her Bridegroom who is her sweet nightingale. Renewing and refreshing the substance of the soul with the sweetness and mellowness of his voice, he calls her as he would call one now disposed to make the journey to eternal life, and she hears this pleasant voice urge: *Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come; for now the winter has passed, the rains have gone far off, the flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land*. (CB 39:8)[35]

As Iain Matthew says: 'Hope opens us up to this—and death is the point when it happens. Death is the point when we are entirely vulnerable to the impact of God' (Matthew, 1993). This is the point of the living flame that breaks down the veil between heaven and earth.[36]

Conclusion

From our assessment of John's theological vision two questions arise: 'what is theology?' and further 'what is the Christian life?' It should be clear by now that for John the two are intimately connected—further, the notion of a theology which does not tell us how to live the Christian life is for John meaningless. What, then, is the end of Christian life according to John?

For Archbishop Rowan Williams writing in *The Wound of Knowledge* (Williams, 1990: 167) the fundamental question John poses to believers is: *For the sake of what do we live?* If the response to this question is 'for my sake', or, as St Ignatius Loyola would put it, 'for the sake of the building up of *my* kingdom' (See *The Spiritual Exercises*) then 'the human subject is failing to respond to the deepest vocation of its being'. John's writings challenge and coax us and if we have not been challenged to at least assess the direction of our lives then we have failed to comprehend his message. For John, we are called at the centre of our being to respond to God's call to us to seek His love which is beyond all creatures and forms. This, however, as has been stressed throughout this chapter and will be throughout this book, is not a call to turn our backs on the created order but see it in perspective for what it is—the place where we meet our Beloved. As Williams puts it: 'the goal of the created order is to point the soul to self-transcendence' (Williams, 1990: 167). The encounter with Jesus Christ, the Word:

> Re-forms the possibilities of human existence and calls us to the creation of new humanity in the public, the social and historical, world—to the transformation of behaviour and relationship, knowing God in acting and making. (Williams, 1990: 118)

As we shall in the remainder of this book, for John this process of breaking and remaking can only occur because Christ has already trodden that way before us. The Way of Following Christ is for John a way of crisis as well as glory. For John, Christ comes to rent asunder not just the veil of the Temple but our own (false) securities, quirks, perks and peccadilloes. The Lord, for him, is returning with his winnowing fan and driving all before Him into the purging fire of the Holy Spirit. If we read John's poetry and theology and remain unmoved by this simple fact then we have failed to comprehend the message of the 'quiet man' of Fontiveros. Ultimately, for John, the goal of human life is to return to the heart of God in the ecstasy of union:

> The soul thereby becomes divine, God through participation, insofar as is possible in this life. And thus I think that this state never occurs without the soul's being confirmed in grace, for the faith of both is confirmed when God's faith in the soul is here confirmed. It is accordingly the highest state attainable in this life…
>
> The union wrought between the two natures and the communication of the divine to the human in this state is such that even though neither changes its being, both appear to be God. Yet in this life the union cannot be perfect, although it is beyond words and thought. (CB 22:3/4)

I shall now turn to the means by which John describes this 'union beyond words and thought'.

3

John the Mystic

In the Inner Wine Cellar
I drank of my Beloved
(CB 26)

In general theological thinking John of the Cross is most commonly associated with the notion of *mysticism*. Numerous commentators (see for example Louth, 1981, Benedictine of Stanbrook, 1954) have attempted to 'fit' John into a supposed 'Western Christian Mystical Tradition' even though it has not often been exactly clear what that tradition is. One of the key arguments of this book is that John adopts a form of writing from his studies in Salamanca and Alcalá of what I will term the *theologia mystica*. This he employs in his writing to develop the *mystical strategies* I will argue comprise a central part of his work.

The *Theologia Mystica*

From the twelfth/thirteenth centuries onwards we see in Europe the rise of a type of discourse that has been referred to as *Affective Dionysianism*. Central to this movement was the group of theologians that arose around the Abbey of Saint-Denis near the schools of Paris (see Haskins, 1957, Morris, 1972, Knowles, 1962). This group of writers and commentators associated with the Abbey of St Victor in Paris[37] took particular interest in the Dionysian *corpus* which was in the process of being retranslated by theologians such as Sarracenus and Robert Grosseteste in a manner which replaced the deficiencies of the older translations by Hilduin and Eriugena.[38] The abbey grew with the schools of Paris and was open to the new theological developments of the university and from its inception it was concerned with questions on the relationship between the *intellectus* and *affectus*. The distinctive Victorine tradition established there combined 'a vigorous program of Bible study, serious and creative theological investigation and disciplined pursuit of contemplation all set in the context of a community orientated towards liturgical regularity and shared experience' (Zinn, 1979: 3). Within the texts of Dionysius the 'Victorines', as they became known, discovered a form of writing that allowed scholars to combine the intellect with the affect. This, it will be argued, formed the basis of much of the later Medieval tradition of what has been termed 'Affective Dionysianism'. Here, as has been pointed out (see especially Rorem, 1993: 214–219 and McGinn, 1998) the *affective* interpretation of Dionysius begins to surface. Influenced by Augustine (as passed down from Richard and Hugh of St Victor), Thomas Gallus, for example, also incorporated the influences of the newly formed Cistercian movement, especially in Bernard's inspiration found in the *Song of Songs*.[39] The translation and commentary of Thomas Gallus added a new dimension to the Dionysian corpus by its emphasis on the affective and on the 'ray of darkness' and 'cloud of unknowing' (both favourite terms of John, see LF 3.49, A 2.8.6, DN 2.5.3 and CB 14/15.16). Dionysius's mystical union with God is now made through love (*affectus*) rather than intelligence. It is this thread of interpretation of the Dionysian corpus made by subsequent writers that creates what we term here the *theologia mystica*.

In subsequent printings of the Dionysian corpus into the early modern periods the work of Gallus and Grosseteste was combined with that of the other authors mentioned. Thus, the Strassbourg printing of the corpus of 1502–03 (Salisbury, 1502) contains the Grosseteste ('Lincolniensis') and Sarracenus translations and commentary together with the *Extractio* of Gallus. As McEvoy comments:

> It cannot be too much emphasised that the entire later interpretation of the *Mystical Theology* was deflected into the path it actually followed through the combined influence of Thomas Gallus and Robert Grosseteste. These earliest Latin commentators provided the context within which not only the mystical theology of monastery and university but also the actual spiritual experience of countless souls was to be formed. (2003: 128)

Thus by the time we reach the writings of Jean Gerson (1363–1429), sometime Chancellor of the University of Paris, we find that he is able to instruct students of the university that there are two types of theology—

the *theologia speculativa*, the theology of the *intellectus* which is concerned with sharpening our understanding of the *logos* of Christian life (largely the type of theology taught in British universities today) and what he terms the *theologia mystica*, the theology of the *affectus* which is concerned with the *pathos* of Christian life (what is often now referred to as 'Christian Spirituality'). Thus, in the *Tractatus Primus Speculativus* of Gerson's *De Mystica Theologia*, the Chancellor begins by asking: 'whether it is better to have knowledge of God through penitent *affectus* or investigative *intellectus*?' (GMT: 1, Prol.1).[40] After much discussion Gerson makes it quite clear which 'strategies' he will employ in his discourse. Accordingly, in Section 27 he declares:

> Thus we see that it is correct to say that as *contemplatio* is in the cognitive power of the intelligence, the *mistica theologia* dwells in the corresponding affective power. (GMT: 1.27.7)[41]

Therefore 'knowledge of God through mystical theology is better acquired through a penitent *affectus* than an investigative *intellectus*' (GMT: 1.28.1). In this passage Gerson contrasts a *theologia mystica* that depends upon strategies of unknowing and affectivity to the intellectual or speculative knowledge acquired through the *theologia speculativa*. He rests with Hugh of Balma's definition of the *theologia mystica* as '*extensio animi in Deum per amoris desiderium'*: 'The extension of the soul in God through the desire of love' supplemented by the definitions: '*sursum ductiva in Deum, per amorem fervidum et purum*', 'a raising movement in God, through fervent and pure love' (GMT: 1.28.5) and '*cognitio experimentalis habita de Deo per amoris unitive complexum'*, 'cognition experienced of God through the embrace of unitive love' explicitly following Dionysius ODN.7: '*Theologia mystica est irrationalis et amens, et stulta sapientia, excedens laudantes*': 'The mystical theology is irrational and beyond mind and foolish wisdom, exceeding all praise'. He later returns to this in GMT: 1.43.2, '*mistica theologia est cognitio experimentalis habita de Deo per coniunctionem affectus spiritualis cum eodum*': '*theologia mystica* is an experimental cognition of God through the union of the spiritual *affectus* with him'—'as the blessed Dionysius states this takes place through ecstatic love'.

Therefore, for Gerson, the *theologia speculativa* resides in the *potentia intellectiva* whilst the *theologia mystica* resides in the *potentia affectiva*. Thus, speculative theology uses 'reasoning in conformity with philosophical disciplines' (GMT: 1.30.2). *Theologia mystica*, on the other hand, needs no such 'school of the intellect' (*scola intellectus*). It is aquired through the 'school of the affect' (*scola affectus)* and (following Gerson's importance attached to the purfication of the affect) through the exercise of the 'moral virtues' that 'dispose the soul to purgation' (GMT: 1.30.3). This is acquired through the 'school of religion' (*scola religionis*) or 'school of love' (*scola amoris*). The acquisition of the *theologia mystica* does not therefore require great knowledge or extensive study of books. Rather, the mystical theology may be acquired by 'any of the faithful, even if she be an insignificant woman or someone who is illiterate' ('*a quolibet fideli, etiam si sit muliercula vel ydiota*') (GMT: 1.30.5). Concurring with St Bernard, Gerson suggests speculative theology can never be complete without mystical theology but the contrary can be the case: we all must acquire this 'affectivity' to reach right relationship with God. Therefore 'the language of mystical theology is to be hidden from many who are clerics or learned or who are called wise in philosophy or theology, so it can be conveyed to many who are illiterate and naïve, provided they have faith' (GMT: 1.31.1). At this point, as with Dionysius, Gerson employs the strategy of concealment for the 'language of mystical theology' is 'to be hidden from many who are clerics or learned or are called wise in philosophy or theology' (GMT: 1.31:1) lest they 'tear apart with the teeth of dogs what they do not understand'.

As he states at the end of section 42: 'To explain these matters an endless succession of words could be added, but for experts these few words will suffice, for the inexpert no words will ever suffice for full comprehension' (GMT: 1.42.9). It is an 'irrational and mindless wisdom' ('*irrationalis et amens sapientia*' 1.43:3) going beyond reason and mind and translating into the *affectus*.

Unknowing and Embodiment in the *Theologia Mystica*

How then does this *theologia mystica* 'work'?

We can talk about the *theologia mystica* as 'a style of writing' or rather 'performative discourse'. The reason for choosing these phrases is to distinguish it, as Gerson does, from the conceptual or theoretical characteristics of the *theologia speculativa*. If, as is argued in this book, the *theologia mystica* is to be understood as a distinctive type of learning then, as Gerson does, we must distinguish its *style* of learning from that of the 'theology of the schools'. For, it is argued here, following a lineage from Dionysius, the Victorines, Gerson and through intermediaries such as the 16th Century Franciscan writer, Francisco de Osuna, both John of the Cross and Teresa of Ávila use a *performative discourse* to work on the reader's affect as much as their intellect.[42]

Theology, for Dionysius, is as much 'initiation' into a way of life as a 'discourse' on that way of life. This is the 'indirect initiation' of Hierotheus, (his teacher) reflecting the classical initiation into the Dionysian

cult (see ODN: 1.8, 3.1,3.2 CH: 2.5 and 1.5 where the whole of Christianity is described as a 'mystery religion'). As von Balthasar points out, even the term *thiasōtēs*—that of the participant in the cult of Dionysius—is used by Dionysius in CH 2.1, 3.2 and EH 1.1. Dionysius, following Plato and his neo-Platonic interpreters, makes a contrast between the rational philosophy that persuades by dialectic and the means of *logos* and reason and this latter kind of 'initiation' that is formulated through the *pathos* (Louth, 1989: 25), cf. Ep., 9:

> The traditions of the theologians are twofold, on the one hand ineffable and mystical, on the other manifest and more knowable; on the one hand symbolic and presupposing initiation, on the other philosophical and capable of proof—and the ineffable is interwoven with what can be uttered. The one persuades and contains within itself the truth of what it says, the other effects and establishes the soul with God by initiations that do not teach anything. (Ep., 9, *Dion*: 1105).[43]

Theology in these texts does not so much 'say' as 'show'—this is the purpose of the discourse. This latter method, the method of *pathein*, suffering, is the one explicitly used by Dionysius's master Hierotheus:

> Whatever he learned directly from the sacred writers, whatever his own perspicacious and laborious research of the scriptures uncovered for him, or whatever was made known to him through that more mysterious inspiration, not only learning (*mathōn*) but also experiencing (*pathōn*) the divine things. For he had a 'sympathy' with such matters, if I may express it this way, and he was perfected in a mysterious union with them and in a faith in them which was independent of any teaching. (ODN 2.9)

Just as for the ancients in their Dionysian initiation, so his contemporary Christians 'cannot grasp the breadth and length, the height and depth' of the revelation of Jesus Christ (ODN 2.9, cf. Paul Eph., 3).

If such 'divine names' transcend all conception and words, how can we speak of them? For 'the union of divinised minds with the Light beyond all deity occurs in the cessation of all intelligent activity' (ODN: 1.5). Drawing from scripture, the names are primarily *praised*. Thus Dionysius at this point introduces his *hyper*-terms in ODN: 2.4 ('supra-essential subsistence, supra-divine divinity, supra-excellent goodness, supremely individual identity') which will be reproduced at the beginning of the *Mystical Theology*. For God, for Dionysius, is 'beyond every assertion and denial', for in the following chapters of the *Divine Names* Dionysius does not try and *describe* the divine reality but rather plays with various models and pictures of the divine. On the level of thought—*intellectus*—the divine is utterly unknowable. This is the point of the aporia, the incomprehensibility, heralded by **the strategy of unknowing** leading to the necessary transformation required by the texts.

Despite his neo-platonic credentials, Dionysius is primarily a Christian author and these processes take place within specifically Christian engagement, in particular the Divine Liturgy and the message of the Scriptures (referred to by Dionysius as the 'divine oracles'). The *theologia mystica* is born within this context and it would be misguided to try and divorce it from this context as some 19th and 20th century devotees of 'mysticism' tend to. Following the process of Dionysius, if *knowledge* of the Divine is not possible, how do we access the 'supra-real'?

Here, Dionysius relies on the other key strategy of the *theologia mystica*—**the strategy of embodiment**. In ODN 4 Dionysius introduces his discussion of *eros* and the erotic and how *eros* connects us to the deity. In McGinn's words:

> The Dionysian program is a cosmic one in which the divine Eros refracts itself into the multiple theophanies of the universe, which in turn erotically strive to pass beyond their multiplicity back into simple unity. (1991: 161)

All movement in the hierarchy of creation, for Dionysius, comes from above and is 'fundamentally erotic'. Not only do all things strive erotically for the Beautiful and the Good (ODN 4), but the Deity itself is *Eros*: 'Divine *Eros* is the Good of the Good for the sake of the Good' (ODN 4.10, McGinn's translation). Using the Proclean procession of *monē*, (remaining), *proodos* (proceeding) and *epistrophē* (reverting), God in God's being as *eros* is able to proceed out to all creation and remain in the Godhead at the same time:

> It must be said that the very cause of the universe in the beautiful, good superabundance of his benign *eros* for all is carried outside of himself in the loving care he has for everything. He is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by *agape* and by *eros* and is enticed away from his dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself. (ODN 4.13, translation McGinn)

Thus, the 'sympathetic' initiation described above is also an *erotic* initiation. *Eros*, is the occasion for the 'special experience of knowing' (*pathein*) in contrast to the 'knowing by mental effort' (*mathein*).[44] It is the arena of Hierotheus's initiation:

> By some more divine inspiration, not only learning the things of God but experiencing them, and through this

> sympathy with them, if we may say this, having been consummated in initiation into mystical union and faith in them which cannot be taught. (ODN 2.9 translation McGinn).

Or to put it in our terms above, it is a knowing which involves the libidinal or *affectus* as much as the *intellectus*. Within Dionysius's mystical game the strategy of deconstruction is complemented by the strategy of embodied, erotic affectivity.

'What cannot be demonstrated' by the Church, McGinn suggests, is according to Dionysius 'made present both on the material level of symbols used by scripture and in liturgy and also by extension, on the conceptual or intellectual level, where the negation of names and eventually the removal of both affirmation and negation bring the soul to union with the divine mystery' (1991: 173). This union, we suggest, being the *erotic union* engendered by eros through the *affectus* and the libido. This is the ex–stasis, the ecstasy: 'Through ecstasy we pass beyond the human condition and become divinised' (McGinn, 1991: 179).

Letter Nine describes God as a drunken lover 'standing outside all good things, being the suprafullness of all these things' (Ep., 9.5). The model here being St Paul, Dionysius's ecstatic teacher and erotic initiator:

> This is why the great Paul, swept along by his yearning for God and seized of its ecstatic power, had this inspired word to say: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal., 2: 20). Paul was truly a lover and, as he says, he was beside himself for God (2 Cor., 5.13), possessing not his own life but the life of the One for whom he yearned (in *eros*), as exceptionally beloved. (ODN 4.13 translation McGinn)

Following Roques (DS 2.1908–10) McGinn sees Dionysius's concept of union as based on the transcendentalisation of knowing into unknowing and yearning *eros* into ecstatic possession. The two processes we have identified as key to the 'mystical strategy' of the *theologia mystica* are intimately connected. Dionysius's exposition of **the unknowing-embodied strategy** thus allows, I would argue, later Christian writers such as John of the Cross to mine the erotic side, especially through the medium of the exposition of the *Song of Songs*.[45]

John as Inheritor of the *Theologia Mystica*

We have seen how John studied the curriculum of *theologia mystica* both in Salamanca and Alcalá.[46] It is the contention of this book that

John would deliberately employ the mystical strategies of embodiment and unknowing derived from them in his own writings. Rather than classing him 'a mystic' in some ontological sense, I would rather stress the 'mystical strategies' that he employs in his writings. We shall turn to these now.

Before doing this it is instructive to look at a set of documents that appeared with the first complete edition of John's works in Spanish in 1618. These are the *Apuntamientos y Advertencias en Tres Discursos para Más Fácil Inteligencia de Las Frases Místicas y Doctrina de Las Obras Espirituales De Nuestro Padre San Juan de La Cruz/Notes and Remarks to Facilitate the Understanding of the Mystic Phrases and Doctrine of the Spiritual Works of Our Father Saint John of the Cross*[47] written by Diego de Jésus (1570–1621), the first editor of John's works. From the point of view of this book the *Notes and Remarks* are noteworthy in that they suggest an attitude to John's writing, and the writing of the *theologia mystica* in general, that is akin to the one presented here.

Diego begins his *Remarks* by suggesting that just as each art, faculty and science has it own specific terminology, so too does theology. However, as with Gerson above, he then states that the *theologia mystica* has its own terminology distinct from that of scholastic and moral theology. These phrases, moreover, may sometimes appear as *impropiedades y barbarismos* (*improprieties and barbarisms*) or other forms of rhetoric in order to achieve the purpose intended:

> This licence to use particular and out of the ordinary terms is especially true in the *Teología Mística* as it treats of things very high, sacred and secret and touches on experience more than speculation—on *taste* (*gusto*) and divine savour *(sabor divino)* rather than knowledge *(saber)*,[48] and this in a high state of supernatural and loving union with God. Which explains the paucity of terms and phrases used in speculative thought, which in these non-material matters are surpassed by the extraordinary experience itself. (Silverio, *Obras*, 1929 I:353)

Diego then proceeds to give examples from Bernard and Bonaventure before revealing his direct debt and interpretation of Dionysius:

> The mystic therefore has licence (as long as it is known that in the substance of what they say they do not contradict the truth), in order to encourage and praise, to understand its incomprehensibility and height by the use of terms imperfect, perfect, over-perfect,[49] contradictory and non-contradictory, similar and dissimilar as we have examples in all the Mystical Fathers, especially Saint Dionysius the Areopagite. Who, in Chapter Two of the

> *Celestial Hierarchy* carries a mystical locution which embraces almost everything we have said, speaking of the excellence of joy (*gozo*) and the quiet that these intellectual substances enjoy.

This, 'quiet' Diego tells us is a 'cruel and furious quiet'/*un quietud cruel y furiosa* that distinguishes the 'mystical quiet' from a 'lazy, insipid and cold' quiet of other states.

Diego's remarks, then, point to the 'mystical theology' as:

a A particular form of theology to be distinguished from speculative, scholastic or moral theology.
b A form of discourse that subverts other forms of discourse, in particular:
c Destabilising 'knowing' in a process of 'unknowing' and
d Preferencing experience or 'taste' as a privileged location to engage with the Living God.
e All of this points to the *strangeness* of the mystical as a form of discourse.

Following our exposition of Dionysius above it is not surprising then that John is interpreted through his first commentator as to be precisely using the forms of the *theologia mystica* as we have outlined. Consequently, we shall conclude this chapter by showing how John does exactly this in his own words and writing.

John's *Theologia Mystica*

In the poem of the *Spiritual Canticle* we find the following verse:

> There he gave me his breast;
> there he taught me a most delicious science;
> and I gave myself to him,
> keeping nothing back;
> there I promised to be his bride. (CB 27)[50]

There can be no doubt that the *sabrosa ciencia* referred to here is akin to Osuna's *sabrosa saber* derived from the study of Gerson we have referred to above. John comments:

> The sweet and living knowledge that she says he taught her is *mystical theology*, the secret knowledge of God that spiritual persons call contemplation. This knowledge is very delightful because it is a knowledge through love. Love is the master of this knowledge and what makes it wholly agreeable. Since God communicates this knowledge and understanding in the love with which he communicates himself to the soul, it is very delightful to the intellect since it is a knowledge belonging to the intellect, and it is delightful to the will since it is communicated in love, which pertains to the will. (CB 27.5)

Throughout his writings he is at pains to stress the importance of this 'tasty science' for understanding the spiritual life:

> I hope that, although some scholastic theology is used here in reference to the soul's interior converse with God, it will not prove vain to speak in such a manner to the pure of spirit. Even though Your Reverence lacks training in scholastic theology,[51] through which the divine truths are understood, you are not wanting in *mystical theology*, which is known through love and by which these truths are not only known but at the same time *enjoyed*. (CB: Prologue, my emphasis)

Once again, the truths of the *theologia mystica* are revealed to the *mujercilla* (literally, 'unlettered woman') rather than the *letrado* (the 'learned man'). This is reinforced in the commentary to verses 14/15 of the *Cantico* on the line 'the whistling of love stirring breezes':

> It must not be thought that, because what the soul understands is the naked substance, there is perfect and clear fruition as in heaven. Although the knowledge is stripped of accidents, it is not clear because of this, but dark, for it is contemplation, which in this life is a ray of darkness, as St. Dionysius says. We can say that it is a ray and image of fruition, since it is in the intellect that fruition takes place. (CB 14/15:16)

At this point he cites the speech of Eliphaz the Temanite from the Book of Job as testimony to the truth of what is being suggested:

> Truly a hidden word was spoken to me, and my ear as though by stealth received the veins of his whisper. In the horror of the nocturnal vision, when sleep usually occupies people, fear and trembling took hold of me and all my bones were disturbed; and as the spirit passed before me the hair of my flesh shriveled. There stood one before me whose countenance I knew not, an image before my eyes, and I heard the voice of a gentle wind. (Job, 4: 12–16)

As Diego suggests, the gentle stroking of the Spirit is a 'terrible stroking', the 'cruel and furious quiet' *un quietud cruel y furiosa* that is received not in pleasant slumbers (the insipid and tepid quiet of the non-spiritual) but in 'the fear and trembling' spoken of by St Paul:

> In saying that fear and trembling took hold of him in the horror of the nocturnal vision when sleep usually occupies people, he refers to the fear and trembling naturally caused in the soul by that rapturous communication, unendurable to nature, in the imparting of God's spirit. The prophet here indicates that just as people are oppressed and frightened by the vision called a nightmare that occurs when they are about to sleep (at the moment between sleeping and waking, the point at which sleep begins), so at the time of this spiritual transport, between the sleep of natural ignorance and the wakefulness of supernatural knowledge, which is the beginning of the rapture or ecstasy, the communication of a spiritual vision gives rise to this fear and trembling. (CB 14/15:18)

As with Dionysius's mystical theology it is also a secret knowledge that can only be disclosed to those who already understand it. This leads to one of John's most celebrated metaphors, the *Noche Oscura*, or as it appears here *la noche sosegada en par de los levantes de la aurora:* 'the tranquil night at the time of the rising dawn'. For John takes the *sapientia oscura* (literally, 'dark knowledge') of the tradition and fills it with the warmth, poetry and beauty of the Southern night:

> In this spiritual sleep in the bosom of the Beloved, the soul possesses and relishes all the tranquility, rest, and quietude of the peaceful night; and she receives in God, together with this peace, a fathomless and obscure divine knowledge. As a result she says that her Beloved is a tranquil night to her. (CB 14/15: 22)

See also C 39 in his commentary on 'the serene night':

> This night is the contemplation in which the soul desires to behold these things. Because of its obscurity, she calls contemplation night. On this account contemplation is also termed *mystical theology*, meaning the secret or hidden knowledge of God. In contemplation God teaches the soul very quietly and secretly, without its knowing how, without the sound of words, and without the help of any bodily or spiritual faculty, in silence and quietude, in darkness to all sensory and natural things. Some spiritual persons call this contemplation knowing by unknowing. For this knowledge is not produced by the intellect that the philosophers call the agent intellect, which works on the forms, phantasies, and apprehensions of the corporal faculties; rather it is produced in the possible or passive intellect. This possible intellect, without the reception of these forms, and so on, receives passively only substantial knowledge, which is divested of images and given without any work or active function of the intellect. (CB 39: 12)

However, he is at pains to stress also that:

> She does not say that the tranquil night is equivalent to a dark night (*oscura noche*), but rather that it is like the night that has reached the time of the rising dawn. This quietude and tranquility in God is not entirely obscure to the soul as is a dark night; but it is a tranquility and quietude in divine light, in the new knowledge of God, in which the spirit elevated to the divine light is in quiet. (C 14/15: 23)

This, he says, is the 'morning light' of a new 'supernatural knowledge' that overtakes the previous knowledge. To explain the nature of this new 'supernatural knowledge' John again introduces a fascinating metaphor, this time the 'solitary bird':

> I think David was referring to this knowledge when he said: *Vigilavi et factus sum sicut passer solitarius in tecto* (I have kept watch and am become like a solitary sparrow on the housetop). This was like saying: I opened the eyes of my intellect and found myself above all natural knowledge, without this knowledge, and alone on the housetop, which is above all low things.
>
> He says he became like the solitary sparrow because in this contemplation the spirit has the traits of a solitary sparrow. There are five of these traits:
>
> First, the sparrow ordinarily perches on the highest things. And so the spirit at this stage is placed in the highest contemplation.
>
> Second, it always turns its beak toward the wind. Thus the spirit ever turns the beak of its affection toward the Spirit of Love, who is God.
>
> Third, it is usually alone and allows no other bird close to it; when another perches nearby, it flies away. Thus the spirit in this contemplation is alone in regard to all things, stripped of them all, nor does it allow within itself anything other than solitude in God.
>
> The fourth trait is that it sings very sweetly. And so does the spirit sing sweetly to God at this time, for the praises it renders him are of the most delightful love, pleasant to the soul and precious in God's eyes.
>
> The fifth is that it possesses no definite color. So neither does the perfect spirit, in this excess, have any color of sensible affection or self-love; it does not even have any particular consideration in either its lower or higher part, nor will it be able to describe the mode or manner of this excess, for what it possesses is an abyss of the knowledge of God. (CB 14/15:24)

It is interesting that John introduces this metaphor at this crucial point in the text for several reasons. First,

that in the true tradition of the *theologia mystica*, having introduced the notion of the 'supernatural knowledge' he will not describe it, but rather, in authentic Dionysian fashion, again suggests a *symbolic function* to destabilise meaning and carry his reader across. Secondly, as we mentioned in Chapter One, one of the lost books of John was apparently called the *Secrets of the Solitary Bird*. When we look at John and Islam in Chapter Six we shall see how some commentators have suggested that John takes this account of the 'solitary bird' not from Christian sources but Islamic Sufi sources.

John continues to present his theme by the continued use of poetic symbols with *la música callada*, 'the silent music', and 'the sounding solitude' *la soledad sonora*, finishing this verse with the line: 'The supper that refreshes, and deepens love. *La cena que recrea y enamora'*. Again, John takes the tradition and develops something new out of it. Following Dionysius, Gerson and Osuna he is at pains to stress the *gustos* and *gozos* (tastes & delights) of the spiritual life but now the *gustos* are specifically experienced in the liturgy of the eucharist:

> Yet for a better understanding of what this supper is to the soul it is, as we said, her Beloved we should note in this appropriate place what the beloved Bridegroom says in the Apocalypse: *I stand at the door and knock; if anyone opens, I shall enter and we shall sup together*. In this text he indicates that he carries his supper with him, and it is nothing but his very own delights and savors that he himself enjoys (*sabor y deleites de que él mismo goza*). In uniting himself with the soul he imparts them, and she likewise enjoys them. For such is the meaning of the words, 'we shall sup together.' Hence these words declare the effect of the divine union of the soul with God, in which God's very own goods are graciously and bounteously shared in common with his bride, the soul. (CB 14/15: 29)

In the following chapter we shall see how John takes the metaphors of purification of the Dark Night to produce his understanding of the psychological process of the *theologia mystica* thus filling out once again the 'supernatural knowledge' of the *theologia mystica* through the well tested method of use of symbol and metaphor. In addition, we shall see in Chapter Five how John the artist will explore metaphor, symbol and image to follow the *theologia mystica* in not presenting the 'things of God' through theological or philosophical analysis, but rather by *showing* them in the initiation into the divine.

Summary: John on the Science of Mysticism

We have seen in this chapter how John takes the tradition and practices of the *theologia mystica* and makes them his own. He adopts them as the best way of presenting what he wants to present. He is aware that the description of the soul's progress to God cannot be done through systematic or speculative discourse, rather, he understands that at this point the practical theologian must use metaphor and symbol if the theological discourse is to have any psychological content. In the next chapter we shall fill out this psychological vacuum by presenting John's analysis of the purgation of the soul through the grand narrative of 'The Dark Night'.

To conclude, perhaps the best place to find a summary of John's attitude to the indescribable which goes under the name of 'the mystical' is in his prologue to the *Spiritual Canticle*, in a way his *Summa* of what the mystical theology is and how it is to approached. The remarks are addressed to John's spiritual collaborator and friend Ana de Jesús. As we have heard, after John's escape from Toledo in 1589 he was re-acquainted with Mother Ana who was now Prioress of Beas de Segura. After an initial frostiness they soon developed a warm friendship that was to endure for the rest of their lives.

The stanzas, John explains, were composed with *algún fervor de amor de Dios*—a certain burning love of God (CB Prol. 1). This, for John is the key for theological discourse, it has to occur from the position of passion—the position of fire that he will describe so eloquently in *The Living Flame of Love*. Out of this fiery love, says John, arises the *inteligencia mística*—the 'mystical intelligence', or what we might nowadays call 'spiritual intelligence' which *by necessity* is not explicable.

So far John is centrally located within the tradition of *theologia mystica* as expounded in this chapter: the notion of 'unknowing' is concomitant with that of 'mystical intelligence'. As he says 'Who can describe in writing the understanding he gives to loving souls in whom he dwells? And who can express with words the experience he imparts to them? Who, finally, can explain the desires he gives them?' (CB Prol 1). To which rhetorical question he replies that no one can, not least the person who has entered into this relationship with the Living God.

Consequently he states, and as we heard reiterated by Diego de Jesús, we must use *figuras, comparaciones y semejanzas*: 'figures, comparisons and similes' rather than rational explanations. Psychologically speaking, as we shall see in the next chapter, this makes perfect sense and gives a true psychological verisimilitude to John's writing on the Christian way. Consequently, he states that his prose writings simply cast *alguna luz en general*—'some general light' (C Prol 2) on the 'figures and similes' of the Canticle. 'It is better' he says 'to explain the utterances of love in their broadest sense so that each one may derive profit from them

according to the mode and capacity of one's own spirit, rather than narrow them down to a meaning unadaptable to every palate'. For this 'mystical theology', says John, the reader, such as Mother Ana, does not require scholastic or speculative theology for this theology is about 'knowing through love and not only knowing but experiencing'. The mystical theology, and especially the *Canticle*, are then for John a 'dying of a "I know not what" behind their babbling'/*un no sé qué que quedan balbuciendo* (CB 7).

As we began this chapter with Dionysius and his mysterious babbling so we end with John's 'mysterious babbling' in the *Canticle*. For, when it comes to the spiritual life it is much better says John to experience it rather than talk about it. Theology for John must primarily be a matter of being drawn into the Triune Life of Our Loving God. To the extent that theology (and for John this will encompass poetry as well as prose) draws us into the encounter with the Trinity at the heart of our lives, then it has succeeded in its aims. To the extent that it fails to induce this encounter then it has failed. We saw with Dionysius that the aim of mystical theology is to lead to an encounter with the living God through experience, not to talk about it. By continuing this tradition John updates the tradition and allows it to flower in the passion of his own unique poetic gifts.

4

John the Psychologist

O Guiding Night!
O Night more lovely than the Dawn! (DN 1)

When the original mothers and fathers of Carmel gathered on the Palestinian mountain eight hundred years ago they pledged themselves to enter into the mystery of God's living presence in the world. In this respect they stood as heirs to a spiritual lineage that can be traced back to Christ and the first Christians—the lineage of the so-called 'Desert Fathers and Mothers'—who from the fourth century onwards had set out into the deserts of Egypt, Palestine and Syria to encounter God through the 'struggle with demons' and the practice of *ascesis*.[52] However, as we have seen, as well as looking backward the early Carmelites looked forward and with the fall of Acre came to Western Europe, bringing with them a 'desert spirituality' which needed to be adapted to the new (often urban) circumstances within which they found themselves. Since its inception, then, the Carmelite charism has retained a tension between the past and the future, the desert and the city, contemplation and action. Accordingly, the Carmelite charism is not one that 'hides under a bushel' but seeks to engage with the movements, ideas and struggles of every successive generation of believers. Which is why such important Carmelite figures as John of the Cross often feel like our contemporaries. The Carmelite charism reinvigorates itself with each succeeding generation, ever renewing itself.

As twenty-first century people we are faced with new challenges in reinterpreting and embodying the Carmelite charism for our time. We are the heirs to great changes and movements that have swept the world and shape the world we live in today. The ideas of Marx, Freud and Darwin, although nineteenth century in origin, have required over a hundred years to be assimilated by secular society to an extent that they invisibly mould our thinking and action today. This scientific and cognitive revolution has shaped our present world and creates what we nowadays call the 'psychological mindset'. Today the 'talking cure' initiated by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) has spawned a whole subsection of culture that embraces as well as Freud's original psychoanalysis, a whole range of transpersonal therapies, counselling, cognitive and behavioural therapies, the psychiatric and psychological sciences and many more too numerous to mention.

The clue to understanding this 'psychological movement' is the suffix *psyche*—which comes from the Greek word *psychē* meaning 'breath' and referring to the Goddess of that name. The original Greek word has a cluster of other meanings and attributes attached to it including *bright, coloured, iridescent, moving, life, spirit* and even *butterfly* (See Tyler, 1997: 82). 'Holding the butterfly', or trying to pin down the mind is a difficult if not impossible process. The mind is indeed 'iridescent, sparkling and constantly changing' yet from Freud onwards Western culture has sought to 'pin down' the mind into particular categories. In the hundred years or so since Freud published his first papers in Vienna the science and study of psychology has flourished and developed in many different directions. The direction taken by psychology and psychologists has often depended on their attitude to what is called the *mind-body problem*, or, as a contemporary British philosopher Colin McGinn puts it: 'how can the water of the physical brain be turned into the wine of consciousness?'[53] Simply put, when we consider the rich storehouses of our mental lives—dreams, fantasies, thoughts, memories, motivations etc. and then look at the physical processes of a chunk of grey material the size of a cauliflower we seem to have two different materials—two different substances even. The question then becomes: 'how can the two be related?'

Although of great contemporary scientific and medical relevance this question is not new and has troubled philosophers for centuries, beginning with Plato (429–347 BCE). How we respond to this question will determine our view of psychology and ultimately of mind. Broadly speaking, since the development of the cognitive sciences and medical approaches from the middle of the twentieth century onwards there has been a branch of psychology that tries to *reduce*, or at least *limit*, the functions of the mind to those of physical brain processes (much present day cognitive psychology would fall into this category) and another branch of psychology which attempts to interpret mental function without necessarily relating it to physical function (many psycho-analytic and counselling approaches would tend to fall into this category).

The ‘Father of Psychology’, Sigmund Freud, fell into both categories. Trained originally to investigate cognitive processes through physiological means under the influence of the then fashionable ideas of Hermann von Helmholtz (1821–1894), he later became interested in the functioning of psychic processes *qua* psychic processes. His middle to later work shows the influence of both approaches and he seems to have lived in uneasy tension between the two.

One of his earliest collaborators and original psychological thinker in his own right, Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), tended to move away from reductionist views of the mind and saw mental processes as part of a larger, or in his terms, *archetypal* psyche out of which much of human civilization, development and indeed religion derives.

Many of the developments and ideas of psychology over the past hundred years seem so self-evident to us and are taken for granted that we do not realize how relatively modern they are in terms of human cultural development. We speak easily and knowingly of someone being ‘extrovert’ or ‘introvert’ and we use phrases such as ‘the unconscious’ or ‘I unconsciously did it’ without really considering what we mean by these terms. In fact, all of these terms, as used today, are relatively modern in their development.[54] Coupled with these developments of our understanding of personality we have also largely increased our understanding of the physiological functioning of the brain and how this relates to psychological functioning. The upshot of this is that we now have a vastly differing view of mind than held by many of the Carmelite writers of the past.

As was stated at the beginning of this chapter, the Carmelite charism looks backward as well as forward. When we immerse ourselves in Carmelite spirituality we inherit a great spiritual tradition but a tradition that needs to be interpreted and explained in the categories of today. One of these key categories is the psychological. However, as we will be apparent by now, this can be far from straightforward. We cannot, for example, talk about John of the Cross understanding ‘the unconscious’ or ‘personality’ as we do today—our psychological categories would have been alien to him. Instead, as we have seen, John would have been working with medieval *scholastic* categories of mind that presupposed a very different world-view. Rather than neurons, instincts and drives John talks of ‘the mind’ in terms of ‘humours’ and the action of good and bad spirits on the *anima* or soul. Accordingly when we come to apply twentieth and twenty-first century categories of mind to the classic writings of John we have to tread cautiously and carefully. It is possible to undertake the task but it is difficult.

Part of this difficulty arises from the difficult and troubled interaction between ‘psyche’ and ‘spiritus’ since the inception of the psychological sciences in the middle of the twentieth century. On the one hand there has been a tendency amongst religious thinkers to ‘spiritualise’ away psychology and on the other hand there has been a tendency amongst psychologists to annex ‘spirituality’ as a suburb or province of ‘good mental health’.

We began this chapter by talking about the Carmelite charism that inherited the wisdom of the ‘Desert tradition’ and brought it to the world of late medieval Europe. We also mentioned how the desert fathers and mothers stressed the importance of the ‘struggle with demons’ and the practice of *ascesis*. From the opening comments we now have a sense of how psychological interpretation can be melded with spiritual teaching in the service of faithful openness to the contemplative goal of love of God. John in his writings uses a great deal of symbology to develop his themes, especially in his poetry. However he is perhaps best known for his talk of ‘the dark night of the soul’. What did he mean by this and how does it relate to contemporary psychology? In addition, is this all that John has to teach us on psychological maturity?

As can be imagined the phrase ‘dark night of the soul’ has been interpreted in many ways and is often now connected with psychological categories of depression.[55] The image of night itself is very powerful with many associations. Iain Matthew has this to say on the associations of night:

> Our first step, then, is to let ‘night’ speak… it is worth letting the resonances which night-time has for us to surface. Some words may come to mind: darkness, solitude, fear, the unknown, immobility, stillness, rest, peace, silence, sleep, dreams, moonlight, adventure, owls, stars, refreshment, friendship, romance, perception. If these are the resonances then such is the journey of faith. The ‘night’ symbol suggests not organised gloom (‘I think it’s the dark night’) but that which comes upon us and is mystery, beauty, terror and new birth. (Matthew, 1995: 52)

Yet it is clear that John was using it in a specific way and within the psychological context of his time. We need to explore that before we can say exactly what John means by ‘the dark night’.

John introduces his categories of ‘The Dark Night’ with the famous poem of that title, whose composition we explored in chapter one. Let’s consider it in full:

A song of the soul’s happiness in having passed through the dark night of faith, in nakedness and purgation, to union with its Beloved.

1 One dark night,

fired with love's urgent longings
- ah, the sheer grace! –
I went out unseen, my house being now all stilled.

2 In darkness and secure,
by the secret ladder, disguised,
- ah, the sheer grace! –
in darkness and concealment,
my house being now all stilled.

3 On that glad night,
in secret, for no one saw me,
nor did I look at anything,
with no other light or guide
than the one that burned in my heart.

4 This guided me
more surely than the light of noon
to where he was awaiting me
- him I knew so well –
there in a place where no one appeared.

5 O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united
the Lover with his beloved,
transforming the beloved in her Lover.

6 Upon my flowering breast
which I kept wholly for him alone,
there he lay sleeping,
and I caressing him
there in a breeze from the fanning cedars.

7 When the breeze blew from the turret,
as I parted his hair,
it wounded my neck
with its gentle hand,
suspending all my senses.

8 I abandoned and forgot myself,
laying my face on my Beloved;
all things ceased; I went out from myself,
leaving my cares
forgotten among the lilies.[56]

The first thing to notice about the poem is that John calls it a 'song of the soul's happiness' as the soul passes into 'union with the beloved'. This is no depression or suicidal imagery. This is the ecstatic voice of one who has reached the furthest limits of human existence.

The second thing to notice is John's abundant use of symbol—they tumble from his pen in rich extravagance: the lilies, the ladder, the breeze, the house, the light and over it all the great overarching metaphor, night itself. Yet this is no cold wet Northern night, this is the warm erotic, sensual Southern night full of the smells, sounds and touches of a hot land baked by sun during the day and now at peace and rest in itself. On a recent visit to Ávila I was walking outside the city with a Carmelite friar as we returned to our friary discussing John's poem, suddenly he stopped and told me to listen. Then he smiled and said, 'I don't need to teach my novices "the Dark Night" anymore, I just have to bring them out here for the night!'[57]

In his prologue to the poem John states that:

> A deeper enlightenment and wider experience than mine is necessary to explain the dark night through which a

> soul journeys toward that divine light of perfect union with God that is achieved, insofar as possible in this life, through love. The darknesses and trials, spiritual and temporal, that fortunate souls ordinarily undergo on their way to the high state of perfection are so numerous and profound that human science cannot understand them adequately. Nor does experience of them equip one to explain them. Only those who suffer them will know what this experience is like, but they won't be able to describe it. (A 1.1)

As we have seen, 'in discussing this dark night' John states that he will rely on three things: experience, what he terms 'the sciences' (this would include our 'psychological' approaches) and Sacred Scripture. Of these three he cites Scripture as the most important for 'Taking Scripture as our guide we do not err, since the Holy Spirit speaks to us through it' (A 1.2). The 'dark night' is, he assures us, a specific spiritual state which people may not have chosen to enter. Worse, once in it not only may we not recognise it but we may be advised badly by spiritual directors or 'other guides', something we shall return to in our final chapter.

Sadly, too often the movements of the spirit are misdiagnosed as a mental disturbance rather than what they are, in the words of Stanislaus Grof, a 'spiritual emergency/emergence' (See Grof and Grof, 1989). For much of the past fifty years a reductionist view of the mind has refused to acknowledge the emergence of mind *qua* mind as a psycho-spiritual phenomenon in itself. John compares those who misinterpret the mystery of the 'Dark Night' with the 'false comforters' who tell Job he must have done something wrong, otherwise these misfortunes would not have happened to him. Further, he cautions against the reductionism we mentioned earlier, where the 'Dark Night' is reduced to 'melancholia, depression, or temperament, or to some hidden wickedness, and that as a result God has forsaken them' (A 1.4). *Melancolia* being John's term for what we would today call 'mental illness' or 'clinical depression'.[58]

'Some spiritual fathers' he tells us, 'are likely to be a hindrance and harm rather than a help to these souls that journey on this road. Such directors have neither understanding nor experience of these ways' (A 1.4). We explored John's *theologia mystica* in the previous chapter, when it comes to the 'secret exchanges' that happen between the soul and God, it is more incumbent than ever for the psychologist, counsellor or spiritual director to acknowledge their 'unknowing' and allow the mystery to unfold 'in darkness and secure with no other light for a guide'.

For John, one of the worst torments a person suffers at this time is 'when it cannot understand itself or find anyone else who understands it' (A 1.4). The simple act of what Carl Rogers termed 'empathy' can be the best gift a person can receive at this time from a 'guide' (See Rogers, 1995, also Culligan, 1983). The entry of the 'Dark Night' John tells us, is not a time for going over past sins and mistakes, it is rather a time 'to give comfort and encouragement that they may desire to endure this suffering as long as God wills, for until then no remedy—whatever the soul does, or the confessor says—is adequate' (A 1.5). Later, as we shall see, John will give directions as to how to distinguish the 'Dark Night' from 'melancholia or some other bad humour' ie. from the spiritual movement of the soul and the psychological, however at this early stage John is more concerned with administering the simple pastoral touch to reassure the person undergoing this transformation that 'all shall be well'.

From the start then John shows that he is concerning himself with a theological perspective rather than what we would broadly call a psychological one. The dark night for John is to be seen as a stage through which the soul journeys 'toward that divine light of perfect union with God which is achieved, insofar as possible in this life, through love' (A Prol 1). Yet it would be unfair to say that John has no psychological understanding or perception of the role of psyche as well as spirit.

As with the desert fathers and mothers, John is keenly aware of the passions and desires of the psyche and if there is one theme that runs through John's writing it is this: the passions and desires are neither good nor bad in themselves. However, they become good when directed towards God our creator and harmful when directed away from Him. In this respect the goal of the spiritual journey is the re-ordering or re-directing of the passions back towards God. Thus, in the first chapters of *The Dark Night of the Soul* John goes through the seven principle passions and assesses their spiritual and psychic behaviour in the journey towards God. The schema he uses, usually referred to rather negatively in the West as 'The Seven Deadly Sins', arose from the ascetic investigations of the early desert fathers and mothers. Evagrius Pontus (c. 345–399), for example, divides the passions of the soul into two sorts—those which draw us towards things that are not God—the so called *concupiscible* desires, these would be for example gluttony, fornication and love of money and those which cause us to push away things of God—the so called *irascible* desires such as anger, vainglory and sadness.[59] Over and above them all, the chief desire which is the root of our turning away from God, is pride. The desert fathers and mothers did in fact have another desire—seven wasn't sufficient for them—the so-called monks' and

nuns' sin of *accidie*—this was the lethargy and restlessness that arose because we were achieving nothing on our spiritual path.[60] John takes up this venerable schema and indeed it is difficult to understand his psychology without having some understanding of this 'desert' (and ultimately Carmelite) typology.

Taking, for example, Book One, Chapter Four of *The Dark Night of the Soul*, we can see how John

approaches sexual desire in the spiritual life. What is perhaps most striking about this passage is John's 'holistic' approach to the passions. Rather than seeing sexuality as separated from spirituality he acknowledges the intimate connection of the two whilst at the same time being able to distinguish their different properties: 'Both the spiritual and the sensory part of the soul receive gratification from that refreshment, each part experiences delight according to its own nature and properties' (DN 1.4:2). Unlike a Freudian approach where sexuality comes first as the wellspring of many aspects of the personality, including spirituality; in John's schema we can almost say that sexual desire derives from spiritual desire. As with the English mystic William Blake, for John 'intellectual energy was not originally sexual; *sexual energy was originally intellective*' (George, 1980: 141):

> Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have curbed and governd their Passions or have No Passions but because they have cultivated their Understandings. The Treasures of Heaven are not Negations of Passion but Realities of Intellect from which all the Passions Emanate Uncurbed in their Eternal Glory. (Blake, *Description of the Last Judgement* 2008: 564)

Following John, we do not, therefore, confine the libido and the sexual instinct to the manipulation of genitals. Rather, it overflows into all spheres of the self: mind, body, heart and spirit. If, as we saw in the previous chapter, John is taking the erotic element of the *theologia mystica* seriously, then this should be no surprise. Using

Freud's language, the 'primary processes of the mind' in John are connected to what Freud calls the 'pleasure principle'. As we saw in the previous chaper, there is a libidinal aspect to the mystical process, a libidinal aspect that was known to the desert fathers and mothers and continued through the medieval tradition to which John is heir (see also Turner, 1995).

The other aspect of John's approach, which again is essential from a healthy psychological point of view, is his gentle 'pastoral' approach—he is compassionate towards the nature of sexuality. He is clearly aware of the difficulties that people suffer with this aspect of their personality, especially in relation to their spirituality—but he is compassionate throughout always realizing the need to keep the 'bigger picture'. He does not see sexuality as an end in itself but part of a greater schema.

'It happens frequently' he tells us, 'that in a person's spiritual exercises themselves, without the person being able to avoid it, impure movements will be experienced in the sensory part of the soul, and even sometimes when the spirit is deep in prayer or when receiving the sacraments of Penance or the Eucharist' (DN 1.4.1). From a dualist perspective, or indeed a body-hating perspective on sensuality, we would expect John to tell us that this occurence is very wrong and we should have a 'stiff upper lip' and try not to let such distracting thoughts get in the way of our meditations. However, his advice is rather different and surprisingly modern to our ears:

> Since both the spiritual and the sensory part of the soul receive gratification from that refreshment, each part experiences delight according to its own nature and properties. The spirit, the superior part of the soul, experiences renewal and satisfaction in God; and the sense, the lower part, feels sensory gratification and delight because it is ignorant of how to get anything else, and hence takes whatever is nearest, which is the impure sensory satisfaction. (DN I.4.2)

As we are full of joy by spiritual delights so, he tells us, it is inevitable that the bodily passions will be excited too. It is not bad as such, just 'taking its share according to its mode', here quoting Aristotle: *Whatever is received, is received according to the mode of the receiver*, an important maxim for John which we shall return to later. It is, he says, something that will naturally decrease as we progress in the spiritual life: 'Once the sensory part is reformed through the purgation of the dark night, it no longer has these infirmities. Then the spiritual part of the soul, rather than the sensory part, receives God's spirit, and the soul thus receives everything according to the mode of the spirit' (DN I.4.2).

There can, of course, be a pathological element to these sexual desires which are, according to John's medieval anthropology attributable to either the action of the Devil, or, and here again he becomes our contemporary, the afflictions of 'melancholia':

> These impure thoughts so affect people who are afflicted with melancholia that one should have great pity for them; indeed, these people suffer a sad life. In some who are troubled with this bad humor the trial reaches such a point that they clearly feel that the devil has access to them without their having the freedom to prevent it. Yet some of these melancholiacs are able through intense effort and struggle to forestall this power of the devil. (DN 1.4.3)

As with all the passions, the entrance into the 'Dark Night' is about re-ordering and re-directing. At no time does he state that it is about destroying our human nature, but in true Thomistic style, it is about grace building upon nature:

> When the soul enters the dark night, all these loves are placed in reasonable order. This night strengthens and purifies the love that is of God, and takes away and destroys the other. (DN 1.4.8)

Although John gives priority to the spiritual, as we have seen he does not ignore the importance of the bodily and the sensual. In addition, as we suggested earlier, although the 'psychological' mindset of sixteenth century Spain is very different from our own it is still possible to see how John distinguishes the realm of the psychological from the spiritual.

In the prologue to *The Ascent* he promised to give us 'signs to recognize this purification of the soul that we call the dark night; whether it is the purification of the senses or of the spirit; and how we can discern whether this affliction is caused by melancholia or some other deficiency of sense or spirit' (A 1.6). This he does in Book One, Chapter Nine of 'The Dark Night'.[61]

John begins this chapter by making a distinction between the 'sensory night and purgation' (spiritual sense) and the dark night caused by 'sin and imperfection, or weakness and lukewarmness or some bad humor (*algún mal humor*) or bodily indisposition'. From a psychological point of view this statement is interesting. Often Teresa and John are dismissed as having relevance to the sixteenth century but not to the present day with our sophisticated developments in understanding mental pathology and illness. Their 'ecstasies' and 'delights' are dismissed as pathological ramblings of sexually deprived celibates. Yet, here as in many passages in Teresa previously mentioned, we see that they have a clear understanding of mental pathology—which they ordinarily refer to as 'bad humors' (*mal humor*) or 'melancholia' (*humor melancólico/ melancolía*).[62]

To make his distinction between the two John proposes three guidelines.

First:

> As these souls do not get satisfaction or consolation from the things of God, they do not get any out of creatures either. Since God puts a soul in this dark night in order to dry up and purge its sensory appetite, He does not allow it to find sweetness or delight in anything. (DN 1.9.2)

As part of the nature of the 'dark night' John had proposed earlier that the individual seeker loses a savour for 'spiritual things':

> It is at the time they are going about their spiritual exercises with delight and satisfaction, when in their opinion the sun of divine favor is shining most brightly on them, that God darkens all this light and closes the door and spring of the sweet spiritual water they were tasting as often and as long as they desired… they not only fail to receive satisfaction and pleasure from their spiritual exercises and works, as they formerly did, but also find these exercises distasteful and bitter. (DN 1.8.3)

According, then, to this first 'guideline of the dark night' John suggests that when there is a decrease in interest of things to do with the spirit there is not a corresponding increase of interest in the things 'of the world' eg. of sensual/sensory pleasure. However, John rightly perceives that such a distaste or lassitude towards the things of the world may also be found with 'melancholia' or 'bad humour'. So he suggests the second guideline:

> The memory ordinarily turns to God solicitously and with painful care, and the soul thinks it is not serving God but turning back, because it is aware of this distaste for the things of God. (DN 1.9.3)

As we experience the dark night of sensuality and spirituality, the one thing that distresses us more than anything is the thought that we have somehow lost our spiritual home in God. We could face anything if this was not the case, without this we are lost. It is this continual return to our spiritual root in God that drives 'the dark night' and it is to this that the soul 'solicitously returns with painful care.' The 'melancholia' leads to collapse of self and self-interest, the 'purgation of the dark night' leads to a deepening of self and understanding in God. The key passage in this section is:

> The reason is that now in this state of contemplation, when the soul has left discursive meditation and entered the state of proficients, *it is God who works in it*… At this time a person's own efforts are of no avail, but an obstacle to the interior peace and work God is producing in the spirit through that dryness of sense. (DN 1.9.7, my emphasis)

As with Teresa's fourth mansion of *Las Moradas*, this is the point where we move from the natural to the supernatural, from our own efforts to those of God. Up to now our efforts have brought us closer to God—our discursive meditation, going on courses, going to church, working for peace and justice—but now that is coming to an end, not only do our efforts no longer help, they may in fact impede the action of God. We are entering the beauty and mystery of 'the night'—and very often our ego will do everything it can to resist and struggle.

The 'sensory' part of ourselves cannot 'enjoy' these spiritual 'delights', it is not ready yet. So it experiences this time as a time of dryness. As with Teresa, John emphasises the sensuality of the *gustos*[63] in

bringing us closer to God. And like Teresa, he employs the strategies of embodiment of the medieval *theologia mystica* to stress this part of the journey:[64]

> The reason for this dryness is that God transfers his goods and strength from sense to spirit. Since the sensory part of the soul is incapable of the goods of spirit, it remains deprived, dry, and empty. Thus, while the spirit is tasting, the flesh tastes nothing at all and becomes weak in its work. But through this nourishment the spirit grows stronger and more alert, and becomes more solicitous than before about not failing God.
>
> If in the beginning the soul does not experience this spiritual savor and delight, but dryness and distaste, the reason is the novelty involved in this exchange. Since its palate is accustomed to these other sensory tastes, the soul still sets its eyes on them. And since, also, its spiritual palate is neither purged nor accommodated for so subtle a taste, it is unable to experience the spiritual savor and good until gradually prepared by means of this dark and obscure night. The soul instead experiences dryness and distaste because of a lack of the gratification it formerly enjoyed so readily. (DN 1.9.4)

Reflection at this point, he tells us, is so delicate that when we try to grasp it or name it, it is 'like air that escapes when one tries to grasp it in one's hand'. Which leads to the third guideline for the dark night:

> The powerlessness, in spite of one's efforts, to meditate and make use of the imagination, the interior sense, as was one's previous custom. At this time God does not communicate Himself through the senses as He did before, by means of the discursive analysis and synthesis of ideas, but begins to communicate Himself through pure spirit by an act of simple contemplation, in which there is no discursive succession of thought. (DN 1.9:8)

John's third guideline relates to forms of prayer, meditation and contemplation. Psychologists have recently begun to appreciate the value of meditation for good mental health and recently many in the West have found much of interest in the great meditative traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism. Yet, within the Christian tradition there is an equally strong and well thought out meditative tradition, not least in the works of John and Teresa. Here we see John applying his knowledge of prayer and meditation to the subtle questions raised by the 'dark night'.

Commenting on this guideline he suggests that it allows us to distinguish 'melancholic states' from authentic spiritual movements, for the former are 'by nature changeable'. St Ignatius Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises* suggests that we observe the 'movements of the soul' and note how these movements come and go —equally, John suggests that mental pathologies may come and go but the deeper 'spiritual purgation' of the dark night is something more permanent and lasting.

In John's scholastic anthropology, God at this point:

> Binds the interior faculties and leaves no support in the intellect, nor satisfaction in the will, nor remembrance in the memory. At this time a person's own efforts are of no avail, but are an obstacle to the interior peace and work God is producing in the spirit through that dryness of sense. Since this peace is something spiritual and delicate, its fruit is quiet, delicate, solitary, satisfying, and peaceful, and far removed from all the other gratifications of beginners, which are very palpable and sensory. This is the peace that David says God speaks in the soul in order to make it spiritual (DN 1.9.7)

Thus, John suggests, if a person is exhibiting the three signs shown here then what they are experiencing may well be the theological 'dark night of the soul'—not necessarily so but possibly so. Of course, as we suggested at the beginning this all takes place against the background of a life of prayer and serious dedication to the 'things of God'. John worked with people within this context and assumed it was the context for the sort of phenomena he is concerned with.

On the one hand John's counsel is tough—his way can seem too hard and burdensome for the uninitiated and it would be wrong to neglect this aspect of his teaching. The famous 'map of Mount Carmel' which he constantly drew copies of for the people under his direction contains the hardest and most sublime sentiments of all:—a tough narrow path to the summit of Mount Carmel with the words *nada nada nada nada nada* inscribed all along the way: 'nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing'.

'To reach satisfaction in all' he suggests, we must 'desire its possession in nothing', 'to come to possess all, desire the possession of nothing. To arrive at being all, desire to be nothing. To come to be what you are not, you must go by a way in which you are not' (A 1.13.11).

'It makes little difference' he says 'whether a bird is tied by a thin thread or by a cord. For even if tied by a thread, the bird will be prevented from taking off just as surely as if it were tied by cord' (A 1.11.4).

Yet what John is proposing is not a 'spiritual boot camp', but that we re-order the passions and desires so that they are redirected to God; which cannot come from some *macho* denial of pleasure or Spartan self-abnegation. The process, as we have emphasized all along, takes place within the context of the loving kindness and grace of God, helped hopefully by the gentle pastoral care of the wise spiritual guide. This he calls the 'more intense enkindling of another, better love (love of one's heavenly Bridegroom)' which is necessary for 'the vanquishing of the appetites and the denial of their pleasure' (A 1.14.2). Regarding this

love he says, rather impishly, ‘it is better to experience all this and meditate upon it than to write of it’. I say ‘impishly’ as in his great poems, especially *The Spiritual Canticle* and the *Living Flame of Love*, John comes closer than perhaps any other Christian writer to expressing the ecstasy and intimacy of the soul’s ravishment by the delight of God’s grace. Something we shall consider in the next chapter.

Conclusions

I have suggested here that a study of John’s writings will contain much that may enlighten present-day ‘psychological’ approaches to the self. John’s approach challenges many of our present-day assumptions regarding the mind and the self. On the one hand it would be hard to ascribe a hard-line determinism or reductionism to his accounts of the soul and the self. He appreciates mind *qua* mind and sees that the subtleties of the human *psyche* will not survive being forced into any physicalist or determinist boxes.

On the other hand he does not possess a dualist view of human nature with spirit somehow divorced from material self. For John, God acts through all aspects of the self and all our passions can be the arena for the ‘fiestas and games’ of the Holy Spirit. As we have already seen, in his lifetime John had a great reputation as a confessor and spiritual director. I would suggest here that one of the reasons for this was his innate and sympathetic understanding of the human condition, including the sort of areas that are now classified under the label of ‘mental health’. Like his co-worker, Saint Teresa, he knew that the spiritual life impinged a great deal on what we would today call the ‘psychological life’ and it is a foolish person indeed who embarks on the life of the spirit without taking account of the deep mysteries of the human *psyche*.

‘John’, writes Iain Matthew, ‘speaks to people who feel unable to change’ (Matthew 1995: 1). We saw in Chapter Two how his theology and view of life arises from the wound within. Trapped in the ‘belly of the whale’ of Toledo for nine months he had time to explore the darkest parts of the human psyche. In his writings, then, we have an unrivalled guide to exploring the depths that offer a release to many who feel today trapped and enclosed. In this respect John truly is our contemporary and a guide for our times.

5

John the Artist

Let us go forth to behold ourselves in your beauty
(CB 36)

John and Aesthetics

Hans Ur Von Balthasar has called John 'one of the two most decidedly aesthetic theologians of Christian history'. In this respect John would have been aware of Thomas Aquinas's definition of beauty from the *Summa Theologiae* from his studies at Salamanca. For Aquinas beauty consists in:

> A certain clarity and due proportion. Each of these is rooted in reason, and it is the function of reason to shine the light in which beauty is seen and to set things in proportion. Therefore, in the contemplative life, which consists in an activity of reason, beauty is found by the nature of the case and essentially. Hence *Wisdom* says of the contemplation of wisdom, *I became a lover of her beauty*. (ST, 2a2ae. 180.2)

For Aquinas there are three characteristics of beauty:

1 Radiance/Light
2 Order/Harmony and
3 Integrity/Wholeness.

Here, Thomas is being very Platonic. Like Plato, Aquinas concurs that perfect beauty can of course only be found in God e.g. perfect radiance, order, integrity and wholeness. However, as is clear in the statement above beauty is an *essential* part of the contemplative life. We cannot envisage the contemplative life without envisaging beauty:

> A thing is called valuable in itself because of its beauty shaped by intelligence. To this shapeliness we respond because of what we are by our nature: each and everything delights in what matches it. (ST 2a2ae. 145,3)

Discussing this Thomist/Sanjuanist view of Beauty in relation to the Platonic triad of Beauty-Truth-Goodness the American Carmelite Keith Egan observes:

> Religion that turns exclusively to truth runs the risk of being lost in irrelevant abstractions or in dogmatism; when the good is the sole concern, the risk is love without rigour or an excessive preoccupation with ethical issues. To banish beauty from religion is to empty it of a powerful divine and human component essential to its wholeness. Of the three transcendentals—often cited together: goodness, truth and beauty—beauty is the transcendental that most easily disappears because beauty is so expansive, elusive and ultimately indefinable. (Egan, 2000: 242)

Of course, an exclusive concentration on beauty alone to the exclusion of goodness and truth brings its own problems, here we run the risk of transcendental otherworldiness or a superficial romanticism. However, as Egan concludes:

> Beauty however described, is compelling in an age when little compels, captivating when there are so few captivating moments, invites to commitment when commitment is fragile.

John, I would argue, recognises, as Egan notes, that beautiful landscapes, works of art, people and culture have a powerful psychological as well as theological effect upon us. As St Augustine famously wrote:

> Late have I loved you, beauty so ancient and so new. Late have I loved you. (Augustine *Confessions* 10.xxvii.38)

John uses the word 'beauty' (*Hermosura*) 192 times in his writing and beautiful (*Hermoso*) 40 times (see Astigarraga, Borrell, Martín, De Lucas, 1990). It could be argued that the words have the significance in his

theology that *Gozos, Gustos and Deleites* have in the writing of Teresa of Ávila.[65]

John himself worked as an artist. As we have seen he was trained in carpentry and draughtsmanship and the famous sketch he made of Christ on the cross is now kept in the Convent of the *Encarnación* in Ávila and was the inspiration for Salvador Dalí's painting *Christ of Saint John of the Cross* at Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Glasgow. In it we see his skill and originality in drawing the crucifixion from a unique and surprising perspective.

For both John and Teresa the beauty of music was important to their understanding of the Christian life and both make frequent references to the importance of music in their writings. For example, the beautiful commentary on the lines *La musica callada*, 'the Silent Music' in the *Cantico Espiritual*:

> In that nocturnal tranquility and silence and in knowledge of the divine light the soul becomes aware of Wisdom's wonderful harmony and sequence in the variety of her creatures and works. Each of them is endowed with a certain likeness of God and in its own way gives voice to what God is in it. So creatures will be for the soul a harmonious symphony of sublime music surpassing all concerts and melodies of the world. She calls this music 'silent' because it is tranquil and quiet knowledge, without the sound of voices. And thus there is in it the sweetness of music and the quietude of silence. Accordingly, she says that her Beloved is silent music because in him she knows and enjoys this symphony of spiritual music. (CB 14/15:25)

Again, there is the famous anecdote of the painting of Christ Crucified at Segovia (today preserved in the Vestry of the church there) speaking to John. Reading beyond the hagiography I would argue we have here an expression of how John engaged with artworks on every level: aesthetic, spiritual, psychological and physical. In such an engagement it is not difficult to imagine that for John the artwork really did 'speak' to him with all his senses. This total engagement with the artwork, akin to Orthodox engagement with the presence of God in ikons, is the true essential sanjuanist attitude to art. An attitude which consumes us and invites us into the presence of God in the centre of the art itself.

John as Aesthetician

Before considering John's views on the nature of the relationship between Christian life and aesthetics it is worth recalling what was said earlier about how John sees the heart of Christian life. This can be summed up in two phrases, the 'habitual desire to imitate Christ in all deeds, bringing your life into conformity with His' (A 1.13.3) and the desire to 'approach God the more closely the more (the person) withdraws from all imaginative forms, images and figures' (A 3.13.1). These two desires are the lodestone of most of John's theology and without it we cannot understand his approach to aesthetics. On one level the two desires are in complete harmony, but on another there is a tension between the more 'cataphatic' demands of the former and the 'apophatic' pull of the latter.[66] It is as though John does not resolve this tension and leaves it throughout his work.

Surveying John's position on aesthetics, von Balthasar senses this tension, however his view is that the centre of gravity of John's doctrine lies more in the latter than the former. He suggests that the 'mangled' texts of John have been tampered with adding a more cataphatic ending to each chapter of Book Three of *The Ascent* which deals with this topic:

> This dialectic is authentic despite the doubts that can be raised about the authenticity of certain passages in the *Ascent*. Its powerful critique of devotional objects is played down at the end of each chapter by words whose unctuousness and feebleness seem to reveal that they are a later addition. (Von Balthasar, 1986: 155)

For Von Balthasar, John is fighting 'on two fronts: against the Reformation's depreciation of all religious images, of all church ornament' and 'against the development of a more passionate style of art in the Renaissance and early Baroque he advocates a rather medieval view of religious art' (1986: 154). This contextualising of John's aesthetics is important. As we saw in Chapter One, the world of John's formation was that of late medieval Spain emerging gingerly into the Renaissance humanism of the sixteenth century. John, as we have seen, benefited from the best Renaissance humanist education available from the Jesuits at Medina. However, much of his heart (and the heart of popular Spanish piety then as now) lay in the simple medieval paintings and sculptures still to be encountered in many Spanish monasteries and convents today. It is noteworthy that all of the so-called 'miraculous' paintings and pictures that 'spoke' to John (and Teresa) are not distinguished by sixteenth century technical mastery and are often rather workaday examples of late medieval Spanish piety.

As we have seen, in John's theology God is constantly striving to meet us before we meet Him, as with the father of the prodigal son who comes out to meet the boy 'while he is a long way off' (Luke, 15: 20), so God's spirit is constantly at work looking for us. For John, this action of God has three qualities:

1 It is done in an orderly fashion, he quotes Romans, 13: 1: 'The works that are done by God are well ordered'.
2 Secondly, it is done gently. Here he quotes Wisdom, 7: 30 and 8: 1: 'God's wisdom disposes all things gently'
3 Finally, we receive instruction from God according to the state of our soul. Here, his quote is from Aquinas's *De Veritate* 12: 6: 'God moves each thing according to its mode'.

As he states:

> In order that God lift the soul from the extreme of its low state to the other extreme of the high state of divine union, he must obviously, in view of these fundamental principles, do so with order, gently, and according to the mode of the soul. Since the order followed in the process of knowing involves the forms and images of created things, and since knowledge is acquired through the senses, God, to achieve his work gently and to lift the soul to supreme knowledge, must begin by touching the low state and extreme of the senses. And from there he must gradually bring the soul after its own manner to the other end, spiritual wisdom, which is incomprehensible to the senses. Thus, naturally or supernaturally, he brings people to his supreme spirit by first instructing them through discursive meditation and through forms, images, and sensible means, according to their own manner of coming to understand. (A 2.17.3)

The Spirit acts in our lives according to where we are, in John's words 'according to our littleness and small capacity'. Little by little God acts in our lives slowly bringing us to where God wants us to be. As we acquire the 'taste' of spiritual things then we will lose the 'taste' of carnal things. This will not happen, as we saw in the previous chapter, through working against our desires, but by a natural process of attraction to that which is good and which 'tastes' good. John quotes here an old spiritual maxim with approval: *Gustato spiritu, desipit omnis caro: Once the Spirit is tasted, carnal things are insipid*. More than once John here sounds like Francisco de Osuna and Jean Gerson whom we discussed earlier, again suggesting his reliance on the tradition of *theologia mystica*.

In this respect John has the same attitude to the aspects of prayer that touch the senses, such as locutions, visions, senses of fragrance etc., as he does to the use of the senses in art. That is to say, in themselves they are not harmful; in fact they can lead us to God with profit. However, we must not linger and dwell on them for what they are in themselves, but must be prepared to transcend them and let go of them as we move towards the nakedness or *Nada* at the summit of Mount Carmel.

John has a fundamental spiritual epistemology throughout all his writing: that is, we must entertain a basic hermeneutic of suspicion with regard to anything achieved in the spiritual life through our own activities, or what he terms 'the active faculty'. 'The passive faculty' (that is, the part of our spiritual lives where God acts freely and without hindrance from us) is for John the place where we can unequivocably be sure that God is acting in our lives. All else must come under this hermeneutic of suspicion and must so remain until God reveals God's plan for us when we return to our home in Him. As he states:

> If souls were to desire to act with their faculties, through their base natural operation they would impede the supernatural (which God is producing in them by means of these apprehensions) rather than derive profit from their own labour. (A 3.13.3)

For, 'people extinguish the spirit by wanting to conduct themselves in a way different from the way God is leading them'. Therefore, with regard to artworks we should consequently 'pay heed not to the feelings of delight or sweetness, not to the images, but to the feelings of love that are caused' by these images (A 3.13.6). We recall Peter on beholding the transfigured Lord on Mount Tabor wanting 'to make three tents' for Elijah, Christ and Moses rather than entering into the 'dazzling darkness' of the cloud that covers them (Luke 9:33). When our souls are touched by the incomprehensible and inexpressible love of God our first natural human reaction is to pin it down, make it tame, and somehow safe. John's counsels are continually warning us against any attempt to tame the unruly and wild Holy Spirit of God. Yet, as we saw earlier, God finds us where we are, and so uses the loving kindness of memory to stir our souls to love of God even long after the event has occurred:

> Only for the sake of moving the spirit to love should the soul at times recall the images and apprehensions that produced love. The effect produced by the remembrance of this communication is not as strong as the effect at the time the communication was received, yet when the communication is recalled there is a renewal of love and an elevation of the mind to God. This is especially true when the soul remembers some figures, images, or supernatural feelings. These are usually so imprinted on it that they last a long time; some are never erased from the soul. These apprehensions produce, almost as often as remembered, divine effects of love, sweetness, light, and so on—sometimes in a greater degree, sometimes in a lesser—because God impressed them for this reason. This is consequently a great grace, for those on whom God bestows it possess within themselves a mine of blessings. (A 3.13.6)

Consequently, from his position of recognising the importance of images and forms as means to help us reach right relationship with God (whilst also recognising the dangers of over attachment to these forms), John is now able to take issue with the first set of Christian attitudes to art that he considers misguided: that is, those of the reformers. As with Teresa, when John talks of the reformers he is really speaking from a position of great ignorance regarding the actual views of the reformers on these topics. Yet, despite the polemic of his discourse there is in John's words the strength of his views regarding the necessity of images in our search for God:

> We are not asserting, as they do, that there be no images or veneration of them; we are explaining the difference between these images and God, and how souls should use the painted image in such a way as not to suffer hindrance in their movement toward the living image, and how they should pay no more attention to images than is required for advancing to what is spiritual.
>
> The means are good and necessary for the attainment of the end, as are images for reminding us of God and the saints. But when people use and dwell on the means as though these were more than mere means, their excessive use of them becomes as much an impediment as anything else. (A 3.15.2)

Yet, despite his strong words for the reformers, John reserves just as strong words, if not stronger, for those who indulge themselves in the sensual delights of beauty at the expense of focussing on the God that is beyond all forms and names. 'The extent and enormity of the disaster arising from joy in natural graces and beauty is patent' he writes (A 3.22.3), 'since on account of this joy we hear every day of many murders, lost reputations, insults, squandered fortunes, rivalries, quarrels, and of so many adulteries, rapes, and fornications, and of fallen saints so numerous that they are compared to the third part of the stars of heaven cast down to earth by the tail of the serpent'. This joy in sensual beauty he compares to the wine of prostitution of the Whore of Babylon in the Book of Revelation—condemnations that would not be out of place in the mouths of many of the reformers themselves!

> No matter how small the amount of this wine of joy, it immediately takes hold on the heart and subdues it, producing obscurity in the reason, as happens with those who get drunk from wine. The life of the soul will be in danger if some antidote is not taken immediately, for spiritual weakness will augment and bring such evil on the soul that it will find itself a captive of its enemies, grinding at the mill like Samson with his eyes plucked out and the hair of his first strength cut. (A 3.22.5)

Thus, John is able from this position to critique the use of any religious artefacts, icons, statues or pictures that enkindle this sensual joy in the viewer ie. 'create spiritual recreation rather than prayer' in the recipient and thus 'pleasing self rather than God' (A 3.24.4). Out of these comments arise a rule or norm for 'discerning when this gratification of the senses is beneficial and when it is not':

> Whenever spiritual persons, on hearing music or other things, seeing agreeable objects, smelling sweet fragrance, or feeling the delight of certain tastes and delicate touches, immediately at the first movement direct their thought and the affection of their will to God, receiving more satisfaction in the thought of God than in the sensible object that caused it, and find no delight in the senses save for this motive, it is a sign that they are profiting by the senses and the sensory part is a help to the spirit. The senses can then be used because the sensorial objects serve the purpose for which God created them: that he be more known and loved through them. (A 3.24.5)

The religious artefact is then for John a means to an end, ie. the contemplation of God in God's self. As always with John, the aim of all spiritual practice is to lead to *freedom of spirit* and insofar as religious objects ensnare and entrap us we should rightly be cautious of them. Once again, John's epistemological hermeneutic of suspicion returns with regard to created things in the spiritual life. Ever the practical theologian, John underscores his message by relating the practical consequences of living too much from the joy and pleasure of sensual and created beauty including 'vanity of spirit, mental distraction, inordinate covetousness, disgust for the poor, aversion for servants, a decided spiritual torpor, a decrease in spiritual exercises and corporeal penances, and lukewarmness and lack of devotion in the use of the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist' (A 3.25).

Out of these basic principles flows the rest of John's doctrine regarding the Christian approach to the aesthetic. He calls these objects 'spiritual goods' and divides them into 'delightful' and 'painful' goods which can then, according to John, be subdivided into those that are 'clearly and distinctly understood' and those that are 'vague and obscure' (A 3.33.3). Unfortunately, as *The Ascent* ends so abruptly all we have left is John's treatment of the 'clearly and distinctly understood delightful goods', these include 'statues, paintings of saints, oratories and ceremonies'.

By now it is more or less possible to anticipate John's views on these matters. Generally speaking as long as they 'serve their purpose' of 'quickening that sense of love in the soul' then they are to be encouraged, but in that the soul dwells needlessly upon them then this attachment is to be discouraged.

Thus, with statues, he suggests 'we should consequently choose those images that are more lifelike and

move the will more to devotion' (A 3.35.3) while 'our concentration should be centered on this devotion more than on the elaborateness of the workmanship and its ornamentation'. This, as we have mentioned, accords with the statues we have remaining that inspired both John and Teresa during their lifetimes and that can still be seen today in their convents around Spain.

Pertinent again to his Spanish context (and still relevant today) is John's aversion to the 'dressing up of statues… with the jewelry conceited people in the course of time invent to satisfy themselves in their pastimes and vanities' (A 3.35.4):

> By this practice the authentic and sincere devotion of the soul, which in itself uproots and rejects every vanity and trace of it, is reduced to little more than doll-dressing. Some use the statues for nothing more than idols upon which they center their joy.

Likewise, John is equally scathing about those who become obsessed with the type of rosary they use for saying their prayers:

> One rosary is no more influential with God than is another. His answer to the rosary prayer is not dependent on the kind of rosary used. The prayer he hears is that of a simple and pure heart that is concerned only about pleasing God and does not bother about the kind of rosary used unless in regard to indulgences. (A 3.35.7)

As stated throughout this chapter, despite John's fulminations against the reformed attitude to art it is hard to read passages such as these without realising the widespread abuses that abounded regarding popular piety and obsessions with forms of prayer rather than content of prayer. Again, with oratories and chapels and places of prayer, we can likewise become obsessed with the places themselves rather than the purposes for which the places were built. However, he still skilfully manages to tread a middle path between obsession with art for art's sake (and his natural suspicion towards the created) and the need to see beauty as a means by which the soul, at the right place and right time, can be moved to closer relationship with God. There is a place for good skill and craft and at one point he goes so far as to say:

> Therefore those who show little respect or reverence for their statues deserve sharp reproof, as well as those who carve so inexpertly that the finished statue subtracts from devotion rather than adding to it. Some artisans so unskilled and unpolished in the art of carving should be forbidden to continue their craft. (A 3.38.2)

Ultimately for John 'God must be served because He is Who is and other motives must not be intermingled with this one'. Generally speaking for John oratories, pictures and so on are to be considered necessary for beginners on the spiritual life rather than proficients.

As stated, despite his scattered positive comments about the use of devotions, statues and festivals John retains an almost puritanical suspicion towards such things. Although it seems hard to believe with von Balthasar that these positive comments have somehow been 'shoe-horned' into John's text by a later editor he clearly has, as we have suggested throughout this chapter, a marked 'hermeneutic of suspicion' with regard to such practices. His own preference in life (eg. at Duruelo, el Calvario and Segovia) was towards the austere and self contained and he clearly had a great love for the simple ornamentation and way of life of the hermits and desert fathers and mothers of old and this is precisely what he commends in *The Ascent* 3.39:

> Spiritual persons should not look for a spot pleasant and delightful to the senses, as some usually do, lest they become absorbed in the recreation, gratification, and delight of the senses rather than in God in spiritual recollection. A solitary and austere location is beneficial for the sure and direct ascent of the spirit to God without the impediment or detainment caused by visible things.

The key word in this passage is *recogimiento interior* at once recalling the important movement of the *recogidos*, or 'the recollected', a name given to a group of Spanish ascetics famously described by Francisco de Osuna in his *Third Spiritual Alphabet*. In passages such as this we realise the close affinity between John and Teresa's reforms of Spanish spiritual life and the 'discalced' Franciscan reforms of a generation earlier that anticipated much of what was to arise later through the action of the two Carmelite saints. Thus, in the key Chapter Six of the *Third Spiritual Alphabet* where Osuna introduces *recogimiento* ('*Frecuenta el recogimiento por ensayarte en su uso*') we find the following passage linking *recogimiento* with the older traditon of *theologia mystica*:

> Some call it (*recogimiento*) '*teología mística*', with which they mean to say 'hidden', because the good master Jesus teaches it in the secret hiddeness of the heart. (TA 6.2)[67]

Osuna distinguishes this 'mystical theology' from the 'speculative theology' in terms clearly borrowed from (amongst others) Gerson:

> This (theology) has two forms: one is called 'speculative' or 'investigative', which is the same thing, the other is

> called 'hidden', which is treated of here and which gives the title to this third alphabet. I do not presume to teach it here, as no mortal can, for Christ alone reserves this teaching only for himself, in secret and in the hearts in which this hidden theology dwells as divine science and something much more excellent than the other theology of which I spoke first… This theology (the mystical theology) is said to be more perfect and better than the first, so says Gerson, as the first serves as an introduction leading to the second. (TA 6.2)[68]

The teaching must remain hidden as, for Osuna, Christ alone is the teacher, Osuna cannot present it directly, it can only be presented through *indirect transmission*. For Osuna, this indirect transmission can only occur in the silence of withdrawal once or twice a day to a place without distractions. The similarity to what John is advocating here is striking and suggests the strong affinity between the two movements.

Ultimately, for John, the lodestone in such matters is not finding God through spiritual joys but 'through denial of their wills and submission to the suffering of discomfort' (A 3.41.2). This, we suspect, is for John the only sure and true path to God that cannot be corrupted by the devil. The opposite of this approach is that of what we could today term 'spiritual tourists' (the twenty first century descendents of St Benedict's 'gyrovagues'[69]) who move from ashram to meditation centre to retreat house 'changing states and modes of life' in order to find the perfect 'spiritual high'. For John, such 'sensible satisfaction' will forever be 'inconstant and very quick to fail'. God's delights and pleasures cannot be attached to one particular place or time, by definition, and we should not seek such. As we see today when there is great (sometimes inordinate) devotion to such places of pilgrimage as Iona, Medjugorje and Lourdes John gives us a timely warning:

> He grants his favor so the heart of the recipient will have a natural inclination toward that place, and will sometimes experience intense desires and longings to return there. But on returning, that person discovers that the place is not what it was before because these favors do not lie within one's own power. God bestows these graces when and how and where he wills without being bound to place or time or to the free will of the recipient. (A 3.42.3)

Yet, as we have seen throughout this chapter, John gives us the option of returning for God:

> Desires, in granting the favor, to receive praise there from that soul, although he is not bound to any place. Second, when there, the soul will be more mindful of thanking God for his favors. Third, while one remembers there the graces that were received, a more fervent devotion will be awakened.

In conclusion then, we see in John's 'aesthetic theology' at attempt, as practical theologian, to offer advice and help which will help the Christian seeking to incorporate beauty and devotional aids into their lives. Writing as he does in 'the time of flames' that is the Reformation, John intuitively realises the need to temper the excesses of late medieval piety whilst not wanting to throw the baby of devotion out with the bathwater of kitschy spiritual practice. He advocates a middle way that preserves the importance of beauty at the heart of Christian life and as a station for entering into deeper relationship with the triune God whilst stressing the dangers that are inherent with any spiritual practice that usurps the goal which it ultimately serves—the singular devotion to the love of Christ's Passion and Glory.

We shall conclude this chapter by turning to the one piece of art work that John created that drew so deeply on the resources available and illustrates as much as his commentary on *The Ascent* his attitude to art—his own poetry and in particular the *Cántico Espiritual*.

John's Technique as an Artist and Poet: The *Cántico*

When considering the *Cántico* we cannot seperate consideration of the poem from the circumstances of its composition, much of which was described in Chapter One. As we stated in that chapter the documents and records of the processes for John's beatification carried out between 1614 and 1618 and then later between 1627 and 1628 mean that we have sufficient records to piece together much of the circumstances of the writing of the poem. However, despite these depositions there still remains much about the composition of the *Cántico* which is disputed and unknown and will probably remain so forever.

From the depositions we find that the first origins of the *Cántico* arise during John's time in the mitigated prison of Toledo between 1577 and 1578. From these records we have also accounts of John having worked on the poems based on 'In the beginning was the word' and 'By the waters of Babylon' as well as the poem that begins *Que bien sé yo la fonte que mana y corre* ('The Fountain') that we reproduced in Chapter One. Although there are some accounts of youthful verses, much of which were destroyed when he entered the Order, it seems as though the Toledan imprisonment was the catalyst that triggered the remarkable explosion of creativity that puts John's poetry amongst some of the most highly valued poetry in all Spanish literature.

The deposition of Sr Magdalena de Espíritu Santo suggests that John had written the first 30/31 stanzas of the *Cántico* before his escape and the existence of several copies of the poem in a 31 verse version (eg. in Antwerp Cathedral), the so-called *proto-Cántico*, gives credence to this theory (See Thompson, 1977: 26). But, as stated already, disputes of the origins of the poem have raged throughout the twentieth century and look set to continue well into the present century.[70] Thompson suggests that rather than seeing the *Cántico* as a 'single work written at one specific time' we should rather best understand it as a dynamic piece of work that developed both as a poem and a prose exposition 'growing beyond its genesis during San Juan's imprisonment' (Thompson, 1977: 27/8):

> The picture of a deeply sensitive man in prison filling the long hours by composing poems around the passages of Scripture he loved so well, without needing to commit them to paper, is a convincing one to those who sense the kind of man San Juan was.

The work, then, continued to grow and develop through its various later expositions and rearrangements for various groups within the order in Beas (1578–9), Baeza (1579–82) and Granada (1582–5). Thus, the next part of the text we have evidence for are the verses found in 35–39 of the present version A of the poem (CA), inspired, according to the testimony of Francisca de la Madre de Dios by comments made by her on beauty and with which we began this chapter (Silverio, *Obras* 5.170).

This then leaves four stanzas unaccounted for: stanzas 32–34 of *Cántico* A and Stanza 11 of the present second version of the *Cántico* referred to as *Cántico* B (CB). According to P. Jerónimo de San José, based on an unknown source, the inspiration for CA 32 comes from a snatch of song John heard from the street whilst in the Toledan prison:

> *Muérome, de amores,*
> *Carillo, ¿qué hare?*
> *Que te mueres, ¡Alahé¡*[71] (See Eulogio de la Virgen del Carmen, 1969: 128–33)

In the light of what we shall say shortly about the influences on John's poetry this would suggest his ability to incorporate street songs and popular *coplas* into his compositions.

As stated, we thus have two basic 'families' of *Cántico* documents. The *Cántico A* versions are best represented by the manuscipt held at the Convent of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, whilst those of *Cántico B* are best represented by the manuscript held in the convent of Jaén. Just to complicate matters the first printed versions of the *Cántico* seemed to use a confusing mixture of both documents (often referred to as *Cántico A'*). As we have seen the first complete edition of John's works did not include the *Cántico* and its first printed appearance was in 1622 and that was in Gaultier's French translation, this was CA. The first Italian translation appeared in Rome in 1627 which was CA with CB11 added (so-called CA') which was the first Spanish version to appear in Madrid in 1630. The first edition of CB as we know it today appeared much later in Seville in 1703 edited by Andrés de Jesús María and based on the Jaén document. The much later appearance of CB led in the twentieth century to some scholars, notably Chevallier in the 1920s, to dispute its authenticity (See Chevallier 1930).

Generally today scholars use CA based on the Sanlúcar manuscript[72] and CB based on the Jaén manuscript. Apart from the insertion of CB11 between CA 10 and 11 and some small typographical changes the stanzas are more or less the same although the order of the verses is different. Thompson writes on the two versions:

> The best guide to San Juan as a poet is CA, because it reflects more nearly the original impulse to sing the divine love. But to appreciate his thoughts, there is every justification for turning to CB, because there is his final word on the *Cántico*. The word of a poet who is also a theologian. (Thompson, 1977: 59)

John as Poet: Influences on the *Cántico*

As much as the genesis and authenticity of the various versions of the *Cántico*, literary scholars are as much vexed by the supposed influence of various sources both sacred and secular. Of the two English speaking authors to tackle the subject in some depth there are two views which seem to represent a scholarly divide in this matter. Both in his scholarly Doctoral dissertation which was published as *The Poet and the Mystic* in 1977 (Thompson, 1977) and his more recent *John of the Cross: Songs in the Night* (Thompson, 2002), the eminent sanjuanist scholar Colin Thompson sees the major influence on the *Cántico* being the tropes and structure of the Hebrew *Song of Songs* which John would have been familiar with from his studies at Salamanca and Alcalá. For Thompson, the structure of the *Song of Songs* with its dialogue between two lovers, the account of their difficulties in meeting each other, and the 'offstage chorus' that comments on this action, is the basic inspiration behind the *Cántico*. Both works use change of tense, mood, location and

geographical position to create an uncertainty and instability in the text which only heightens its skill as a piece of drama. Quoting Morales, Thompson notes that John uses 1,583 explicit and 115 implicit quotations from the Bible in his works, far outweighing any supposed influences from other sources.

The other significant literary commentator to shape studies of John's poetry in the English-speaking world was the erstwhile Bloomsbury member, Gerald Brenan, whose *St John of the Cross: His Life and Poetry*, published in 1973 did so much to stimulate renewed interest in John's poetry (Brenan, 1973).[73] Brenan followed more closely the work of Dámaso Alonso (Dámaso Alonso: 1966) in stressing the influence on John of popular and literary models, especially the poetry of the Golden Age Renaissance poet Garcilaso de la Vega.

Garcilaso, a courtier of Charles V, was one of the first Spanish poets to use the new Renaissance styles of Italian meter in Spanish literature. Killed in 1536 his work, along with that of his friend Juan Boscán, was published by Boscán's widow in 1543. Once again in Garcilaso's work we have the expression of the Renaissance/Platonic ideal of the beautiful finding expression in poetic form. For Brenan, Garcilaso slows the 'thin and monotonous' effect of previous Castilian verse producing a rhythm, primarily through the use of hendecasyllables, that controls the expression of syllables in a stressed language such as Spanish. The effect, he says, is to produce a verse which is 'slow, languorous and melancholy—proper poetry for a young man whose theme is unsuccessful love' (Brenan, 1973: 104) but with a rhythm 'that charms the ear'. This romantic effect is clearly apparent in John's poetry, as Egan says: 'read aloud, as it should be in Spanish, John's poetry is a festival of beautiful sounds' (Egan, 2000: 246).

It seems convincing from John's use of Garcilaso's verse forms in his own poetry, in particular in the three great poems of the *Cántico*, the *Noche Oscura* and the *Llama* that there was an influence from here. Significantly, in the prologue to the *Llama*, John himself describes his debt to Garcilaso/Boscán in the words:

> The composition of these lyric lines is like those that in Boscán are given a religious meaning and that go:
>
> *La soledad siguiendo.*
> *llorando mi fortuna,*
> *me voy por los caminos que se ofrecen*, and so on.
>
> In these stanzas there are six lines; the fourth rhymes with the first, the fifth with the second, and the sixth with the third. (LF 1)

Referring to the Christianised versions of Garcilaso/Boscán made by Sebastián de Córdoba and published in 1575. In Brenan's words, Córdoba was 'a third rate versifier who had brought out a pastische of Garcilaso in which the love poetry of his eclogues and *canciones* is turned often line by line into a religious allegory of the love of God for the soul' (Brenan, 1973: 107). Brenan, following Dámaso Alonso, hypothesises that John must have read de Córdoba shortly after the publication of his verses in 1575 in Ávila and two years before his own imprisonment in Toledo. This, suggest Brenan and Dámaso Alonso, was the key influence that must have rekindled in John memories of his own reading of Garcilaso as a young student of the Jesuits in Medina. Thompson, however, disputes this suggesting it is not definite that John would have been familiar with Garcilaso from this early age and even so that the influence has been overemphasised by other commentators.

There is no doubt that the *Cántico* in particular is steeped with the imagery and tropes of the *Song of Songs* such as the pomegranate, the wine cellar, the turtle dove and the lilies. However in addition there are many of the new Renaissance symbols of pastoral love which are very prominent in the poetry of Garcilaso and Boscán: the sirens, nightingales, nymphs, doves and shepherds that so populate the romantic Renaissance imagination.

Before leaving the subject of John's influences it is worth finally mentioning the popular *canciones* and *coplas* which we have already seen make an appearance in John's verse. As both Brenan and Thompson concur, the use of popular song was an acceptable form of Carmelite practice and of the two saints, St Teresa seems to have been less adverse to utilising these popular song forms in her entertainments for her sisters (her tambourine and castanets can still to this day be seen in the *Encarnación* at Ávila). John, as we may recall from Chapter One, was brought up in close contact with the *morisco* and gypsy communities of Castille and would no doubt have heard many of the popular songs of the hybrid Castillian tradition as a young lad. 'These little verses', writes Brenan:

> were sung everywhere as popular *coplas* used to be till the transistor radio drove them out and we know that Juan's brother Francisco often had one on his lips… their subject was nearly always love, like that of pop songs today. (Brenan, 1973: 104)

These little verses, or *villancicos*, usually only two or three lines long and often repeated, can be found

throughout John's smaller poems, most notably in the repeated refrain of 'La Fonte': 'aunque es de noche'. Despite Brenan's pessimism it is possible even now to still hear these little *coplas* and *villancicos* being spontaneously sung in Spanish streets at night—usually during Fiesta time. It seems this exuberant strand of Spanish life cannot be suppressed even by the onslaught of modern music media.

Conclusion: John the Artist and Poet

Brenan describes John as a 'man of two books': the *Song of Songs* and Garcilaso's poetry. To this we can add the popular *canciones* of his day. Combined in the mysterious crucible of Toledo and in the context of John's view of the importance of art for nurturing the spiritual life the result has been the writing of some of the most inspiring and significant Christian verse ever. The *Cántico*, as we have seen, is a remarkable work that produces an almost cinematic effect on the listener, playing, as it does, with time and space to disorientate the listener:

The sighing of the air,
The song of the sweet nightingale,
The grove and its beauty,
In the serene night
with the flame that consumes and is painless

Noone looked at her…
Nor did Aminadab appear,
The siege was completed,
and the cavalry
at the sight of the waters descended (CB: 39–40)

As Thompson writes:

> Changes of speaker, audience, tense, location, large numbers of unrelated images; paradox, logical nonsense, constant uncertainty on the reader's part as to the exact meaning—the whole poem is constructed in this extraordinary manner. In parts it is almost impressionistic in feel; in other parts, it seems to be using a 16th century equivalent of modern cinematographic technique:—flashbacks introduced without warning, events implied rather than stated, characters introduced in passing, focussed upon briefly, then discarded. (Thompson, 1977: 86)

At the beginning of the chapter we developed the Christian theory of aesthetics that John propounds in his writing. Just as he applies his theories to religious imagery, processions and chapels so we can see that in his own poetry the same norms regarding Christian art hold. It is a form of art that takes the contemplation of beauty, both in the created world of nature and the man-made world of art, as a serious means to help deepen the encounter between the individual soul and God. However, the object of beauty is to be seen as a means to an end and the Christian is not encouraged to remain with the object of love but continually to move onwards and upwards to the great love of God. The *Cántico* is a highly dynamic piece of writing and in this it mirrors John's view that as Christians we cannot remain with the object of beauty, but like the soul in the poem, we must continually 'seek my Love' heading for the mountains and forests past wild beasts, strong men and frontiers until we reach the promised end when 'we shall behold ourselves in His beauty' and 'the siege is still'.

The purpose of John's poetry, then, according to his own words on the nature of Christian art, is to stimulate the soul's journey to God through contemplation of God's beauty in all created things and art forms. However, these art works are a necessary transitory stage before we contemplate the eternal beauty of God in God's self at the final union, the end of Christian life.

For a contemporary critic such as López-Baralt John's apparently illogical use of symbols creates a significant emotional and expressive instability in his poetry unique amongst the writers of Golden Age Spain that foreshadows the work of twentieth century poets such as Rimbaud, Pound and Lorca: 'In effect many images used by St John appear enigmatic to the reader as they associate elements apparently disconnected: see for example his verse *Mi Amado las montañas*' (López-Baralt, 1990: 23). For her, this quality in John's poetry is his unique contribution to the evolution of Spanish poetry:

> The frequent incoherence and verbal vagueness which we have explored—which disconcerts us and makes us admire them, constitute one of the most significant and original artistic dimensions of the verse of Saint John. (López-Baralt, 1990: 30)

The 'a-rational, a-logical' and confusing elements in John's poetry, I would argue here, arise precisely from the tradition of *theologia mystica* that we explored in Chapter Three with its strategies of unknowing and

embodiment. As we saw in the earlier chapter, John is an acknowledged master of these techniques, and it is precisely this, I would argue, that contemporary critics such as Thompson and López-Baralt are detecting in John's work. He knows that to speak on the edge of mystical and human religious experience the ordinary tropes of language must break as we enter the 'stuttering' of the *theologia mystica*.

In conclusion, then, I would like to suggest that John's own unique contribution to Spanish (and world) literature arises from two sources: his own well thought through theology of Christian art as explored in this chapter, and his use of the *theologia mystica* as a means of transmitting and creating a groundbreaking poetic art that allows Spanish literature to develop new avenues of expressivity and emotional nuance. His art is a unique combination of theology and artistic expression that is one of the highest syntheses of all Christian art.

6

John and Interfaith Dialogue

To come to be what you are not
You must go by a way in which you are not A
1.13.11

One of the main themes of this book has been how John looks back to medieval and pre-medieval patterns of thinking but is also able to speak to contemporary twenty-first century concerns. Towards the latter half of the twentieth century it became increasingly important that the future of Christianity could not be considered in isolation from that of other major world faiths. In the case of Roman Catholicism this became apparent from the last document of the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, and similar documents tackling the need for more perspicacious interfaith relations are to be found in all the major Christian denominations.

Events from 9/11 in 2001 onwards have only served to impress upon people of faith the urgency of finding a solution to 'the clash of civilisations' and the need for tolerance and understanding between the faiths if humanity is to have any civilised future.

The case of St John and the context of Spain of *las tres culturas* is instructive in this instance and a study of how John's writings can be related to non-Christian sources is helpful in revealing the potentials and limits of such explorations. As described in Chapter One, the six hundred years of religious interaction between Islam, Christianity and Judaism in Medieval Spain created a unique environment of interaction which in many ways prefigures elements of our own contemporary multi-faith societies. Which is not to say that Medieval Spain was a multicultural dream house where everyone got on together in happiness and peace. Such a romantic view is clearly misguided. However, to see no evidence of interaction between the faiths and their influence upon each other would also be insular in the extreme. In the case of John (and Teresa), the situation is heightened by the fact of a self-evident mixing of culture and religion in the genealogy of the two, as we have already seen.

In this chapter we will explore how John has been 'co-opted' into interfaith dialogue and the connections that have been made between his own writings and that of other faiths. For the sake of concision I will concentrate in particular on two instances: the relation between St John and Islam and Buddhism. Both of these examples will also relate to similar themes that arise when John's relation to Judaism and Hinduism are considered. However, these latter two instances will not be covered in detail here.

John and Islam

The first serious work to link John with the Muslim culture of *Al Andalus* was that of the Roman Catholic priest and scholar Miguel Asín Palacios (1871–1944).[74] Born in 1871 in Zaragoza, Asín Palacios began his studies at the University of Zaragoza in 1887 where he fell under the influence of the famous arabist Julián Ribera which led to a lifelong interest in Arabic culture and writings, especially from *Al Andalus*. Ordained priest in 1895 he wrote his doctoral thesis on Al-Ghazzali which led to an enduring interest in tracing the influence of Islam on the literature and life of Spain, especially that of the Golden Age mystics. As such the methodological questions he raised have never gone away and continue to haunt sanjuanist studies. Writing after his death Zaragüeta compared his approach to Arabic sources with that of the English scholar John Henry Newman:

> Like Cardinal Newman, author of *The Grammar of Assent* and other exquisite books on the interior life, (Asín Palacios) possessed a certain mental affinity which manifested itself in basic methodological principles, with which he could judge the results of his investigations into the unexplored territory of Muslim literature. (Zaragüeta y Bengoechea, 1952: 14)

Whilst Raimundo Lida is quoted as saying that 'If all the literary production of Spain were to be lost, and only ten books could be saved, I would save one of Asín Palacios' (quoted in López-Baralt, 1991: xi).

In his 1933 article for the first edition of the journal *Al-Andalus* Asín Palacios argued for what he saw as textual evidence linking what he termed 'the renunciation of charismata' in John of the Cross and the Andalusian/North African Sufi school of the Shadilites. He sums up his understanding of the 'renunciation of charismata' thus:

> The doctrine of renunciation has an underlying metaphysics whose fundamental principle is this: God is inaccessible to the creature; in regard to the absolute transcendency of the infinite Being who is devoid of all analogy with finite being, it is inferred that God is nothing that we can feel, imagine, think or desire. When this principle is applied to the mystical, it becomes axiomatic that everything the soul does to reach God, far from being an adequate and efficient means, will be an impediment, obstacle and veil that will deprive him of attainment of union. (Asín Palacios, 1933: 12)

'The soul' he continues therefore, 'must empty itself, denude itself and liberate itself from all sensual appetite, from all self-interests, from every inclination toward and leaning on creatures… It must kill every initiative and autonomy of the free will in order to find calm, spiritual quiet, the aloneness with God that consists in self-annhiliation, the negation of self and total abandonment or relinquishment.'

Asín Palacios's argument is interesting, not least because from the 1930s onwards it is found increasingly in the writings of scholars who want to seek a commonality between Islamic 'negation mysticism' and the Christian tradition of the *via negativa*. The classic exposition of this argument is found in Michael Sells's *The Mystical Language of Unsaying* (Sells, 1994). Both Palacios and Sells see the 'mystical strategies' of the Christian mystical tradition as arising from a basic aporia: 'the aporia—the unresolvable dilemma—of transcendence' (Sells, 1994: 2), that is to say, the dilemma that arises when we try to give names to that which is beyond names: 'any statement of ineffability, "X is beyond names", generates the aporia that the subject of the statement must be named (as X) in order for us to affirm that it is beyond names'. In this respect Sells's argument reflects that of Asín Palacios's movement from theological statements about the nature of the inaccessibility of God to implications regarding individual 'renunciation of charismata' and as Asín calls it, 'liberation from every intiative and autonomy of the free will' found in 'self-annhiliation, the negation of self and total abandonment and relinquishment' (Asín Palacios, 1933: 12).

As we have seen, from the earliest moment when John's doctrine was first open to serious theological scrutiny during his beatification process questions arose as to how truly Christian John's teaching was. In more recent theological work on John's teaching interpretations such as those of Sells and Asín Palacios which stress the similarity between John and Islam have been complimented by a growing body of literature that stresses the similar congruence between John and Buddhist modes of thought. These latter, like Asín Palacios, take the 'self annhiliation, the negation of self and total abandonment and relinquishment' as the key launching pad for understanding the nature of the relationship between the two sets of writings.

Unknowing and Unsaying

In *The Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Sells, 1994) Sells suggests that from the sixth century onwards, clearly influenced by neo-Platonic writers such as Plotinus, the three Western monotheistic faiths have practiced a highly developed form of apophatic language, or what he calls 'the mystical language of unsaying'. This language, he argues, reaches its greatest development in the High Middle Ages (he cites Marguerite Porete, Meister Eckhart and Ibn Arabi as the highest developments of the form) only for it to diminish until 1492, 'a convenient end-date for this common world, the year Jews and Arabs were expelled from Spain, the colonial age began and the civilisation held in common by Jewish, Christian and Muslim cultures began to break apart into increasingly separate spheres' (Sells, 1994: 221). Similarly, Sells, when considering the 'aporia' of God's inaccessibility to His creatures suggests three responses:

1 Silence.

2 To distinguish between ways in which the transcendent is beyond names and the ways it is not. Here we have the classic Western medieval scholastic distinction between *God as God is in God's Self* and *God as perceived in God's creatures*.

3 The third response, which is the one explored by Sells, is to maintain the tension of the aporia and develop a form of *performative discourse* that realises that every assertion of the nature of the transcendent must be accompanied by another that denies it.

This 'mystical language of unsaying' is primarily a mode of discourse rather than an 'apophatic theory':

> In those writings, the effort to affirm transcendence leads to a continuing series of retractions, a propositionally unstable and dynamic discourse in which no single statement can rest on its own as true or false or even meaningful. In such discourse, a rigorous adherence to the initial logical impasse of ineffability exerts a force that transforms normal logic and semantic structures. (Sells, 1994: 3)

For Sells, it is primarily a 'discourse of double propositions' 'in which meaning is generated through the tension between the saying and the unsaying' (1994: 12). To achieve its ends it uses paradoxes, contradictions and coincidences of opposites.

It cannot be denied that Sells is developing an interesting thesis here, not least in the far-reaching effects of the Dionysian corpus on medieval Muslim, Christian and Jewish theologies. One of the central theses of the book, which is unsurprising considering Sells's background as a scholar of Islamic mystical texts as well as Christian ones, is that there may have been a common core of influence between Sufi texts, such as the ones of Ibn Arabi that he explores, and the writings of such 'masters of apophasis' as Porete and Eckhart. Thus in analysing the 'Mirror of Simple Souls' Sells makes comparisons between the 'stages' of Porete's spiritual journey and the Sufi 'stages', especially of perplexity (*hairat*) and annihilation (*fanā*):

> The term 'annihilated soul'—which I can find used nowhere else in previous Christian literature—its combination with the reversion to the precreative state, and the reference fusions that take place at the point of mystical union show a multifold affinity to Sufi thought that can hardly be dismissed as pure coincidence… They also suggest that at this particular moment in the history of Western mysticism, Sufism and European Christian mysticism were part of a larger multireligious cultural entity. (Sells, 1994: 134)

This notion of a fused Sufi-Christian 'multireligious entity' whilst interesting means that Sells does tend to suggest the apophatic is a distinctive language typical of this 'multireligious cultural entity'.

We have already argued in relation to John of the Cross that he is not so much concerned with justifying notions of the transcendent deity, certainly not as part of any explicitly philosophical or theological scheme, but rather that his 'apophasis', if we can call it such, is part of the tradition of *theologia mystica* inherited from Osuna, Gerson and the Parisian schools. Thus, I suggest, that we will not find in John the 'apophasis of unsaying' analysed by Sells, and more suggestive it would seem of the Sufi mechanisms of writers such as Ibn Arabi, but rather something more akin to the 'unknowing'—the *theologia mystica*—of Osuna and Gerson. This, we have argued previously, has more affinity to the 'affective Dionysianism' of the West than the severe and rather pure apophasis (or *fanā*) of the Sufi tradition. Which is not to say that John does not use apophatic strategies, but rather they are strategies that are part of the affective Dionysianism of Gerson and Osuna rather than the *fanā* -apophasis of the Sufi tradition. That is to say, the aim of John's apophasis is very different from that of the Sufi tradition explained by Sells.

As with much debate about the relationship of John with other faiths, the question often becomes, 'What does John mean by "negation"?' followed by 'Is John's negation the same as Zen *Satori*, Sufi *fanā*, Buddhist *nibbanā* or Hindu *advaita*?' It is to these questions we turn next.

John, Negation and Buddhism

Turning to some of the growing work on John and Buddhism an interesting paper appeared in 2006 from Abraham Vélez de Cea (Vélez de Cea, 2006). In his paper Vélez de Cea suggested that much of the commentary which seeks to relate John to Buddhism has 'three questionable hermeneutical tendencies' (Vélez de Cea, 2006: 140). These tendencies, I would argue, can certainly be applied to similar work done between John and Islam, and would probably apply to other applications of John to other world faiths.

The first is the tendency 'to exaggerate the similarity between John of the Cross and Buddhism'. He takes as an example the work of the American Trappist monk Thomas Merton who at one point declares 'Frankly I would say that Zen is nothing but John of the Cross without the Christian vocabulary' (In Nugent, 1996: 53). As Vélez de Cea points out such statements as these gloss over any differences between the technical language of John's Christian terminology and that of Buddhism. John, as he points out, 'cannot be categorised a nondualist because he maintains a clear distinction between God and creatures' (Vélez de Cea, 2006: 140). Such forms of 'inclusivism' really do not do justice to John or indeed the faiths to which he is being compared. Equally, we saw above how a similar tendency was found in Asín Palacios.[75]

The second tendency he records is 'to understand John of the Cross through categories and concepts foreign to his framework' (Vélez de Cea, 2006: 141). Here he cites for example the work of the Irish Jesuit William Johnston. Johnston for example sees John's experience of God as equivalent to the Zen experience of *mu*, ie. nothing, as he states 'God is all in Himself but nothing to us, the experience of God can be like nothing' (Johnston, 1988: 127).

Finally, the third dubious hermeneutical position is 'to discuss John of the Cross together with other

mystics representative of the Christian *via negativa*, but without sufficiently differentiating their respective ideas and spirituality' (Vélez de Cea, 2006: 142). Following on from above I would also characterise this as part of Sells's approach to 'the apophatic tradition' to create perhaps a monolithic tradition which is probably not there in the first place.

Unfortunately, having opened up these three important hermeneutical tools of interpretation, it seems that Vélez de Cea himself is guilty of at least one of these suppositions—that is, supposition two. For having emphasised the importance in John of the practical steps to achieving *nada* in one's life, the author himself seems to misunderstand the basic nature of John's view of negation. Thus he states (Vélez de Cea, 2006: 152) that 'emptiness of the soul' for John (a term which in itself seems alien to John) 'leads to development of all virtues'. 'The appetites' he states 'weaken a person's virtue. By mortifying and purifying our appetites, especially the four natural passions (joy, hope, fear and sorrow), great virtues arise… Emptiness of the soul and the attainment of moral good, tranquillity, peace and repose are intertwined… he simply suggests that the lack of passions allows the soul to grow prosperously in virtue' (Vélez de Cea, 2006: 152). I believe this is a fundamental misunderstanding of John's basic teaching and as it is also typical of so much that happens when John's *nada* is compared with other faiths it is worth going into in more depth. There are two fundamental problems I would claim in the thesis, first that John advocates an 'emptying of the soul' (whatever that is) and secondly that 'the passions' have to be removed. Neither, as we argued in Chapter Four, are in John's doctrine and in fact suggest a misunderstanding of his doctrine very much along the lines here of the hermeneutical misrepresentation that Vélez de Cea already stated.

Accordingly it is worth stating what exactly John understands by 'the appetites' and how they are to be 'redirected' or 'transformed', rather than, as presented by many of the non-Christian systems of negations, to be 'negated' or removed.

John's Understanding of 'The Appetites'

In considering John and the appetites the first thing to take into account is, as Chowning states, that John's negation 'has nothing to do with neoplatonic dualism or a denial of creation… (he) is thoroughly Christian and incarnational. He exalts the beauty and dignity of creation and the purpose for which God created the world… thus, creation reflects the presence, beauty and excellence of God and increases love in the person who reflects upon it' (Chowning, 2000: 3). As we saw in both Chapters One and Four, John encouraged his novices to find God in nature and his poetry, as we have seen, contains a strong element of nature mysticism. God is seen as being in all creation and creation, as created by God, is very good indeed. Included in this is the human person, created in the image and likeness of God with all that that entails. As we saw in Chapter Four, in this respect John has thoroughly absorbed Thomas Aquinas in his university training and shows a true Thomist grasp of God's salvific action proceeding through 'grace building upon nature'. Therefore, our spiritual practices are not so much concerned with escaping matter and creation (which some of the non-Christian interpretations of John above imply) but rather examining our own attitudes to nature and seeing how our craving and desire to seize matter is distorting our fundamental orientation as a being created in the image and likeness of God:

> John insists that what obstructs our relationship with God is not material reality as such, but the human heart when it craves, desires and tries to possess material objects, people and situations for selfish reasons. (Chowning, 2000: 4)

Chapters 3–13 of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* present John's deepest account of what he terms *los apetitos* —'the appetites'. At first sight his definition of them seems largely negative:

> For the sake of a clearer and fuller understanding of our assertions, it will be beneficial to explain here how these appetites cause harm in two principal ways within those in whom they dwell: They deprive them of God's Spirit; and they weary, torment, darken, defile, and weaken them. A 1.6.1
>
> The appetites are wearisome and tiring because they agitate and disturb one just as wind disturbs water. And they so upset the soul that they do not let it rest in any place or thing. A 1.6.6

Yet to see John's anthropology of *los apetitos* as largely negative, as some commentators have done, is, I would argue, to miss out on the subtlety of his approach to human nature. The first distinction to draw is the difference John makes between what he terms 'natural' and 'voluntary' appetites. The former, he informs us 'are little or no hindrance at all to the attainment of union' (A 1.11.2) for 'to eradicate the natural appetites, that is, to mortify them entirely, is impossible in this life'. Thus, as with the anthropology of the desert fathers and mothers, to which we have seen John is heir, there is a basic substratum to our human nature that cannot be eradicated. These passions are there and are to be seen as part of what makes us human. John, never talks about eradicating the appetites, but always redirecting them, John is not, as

some commentators suggest, advocating destruction of the self, but *transformation* of the self. So, just as the natural appetites will remain and cannot do harm, the voluntary appetites, the consent to the natural appetites, will have to be redirected.

As we saw in Chapter Four, we could translate what John is attempting to descibe here into contemporary psychological language. Here I am helped by a letter written in the 1960s by the British Benedictine Bede Griffiths. Writing to a friend of his, Dr Mary Allen a Jungian analyst, Bede Griffiths makes some startling analogies between the psychological insights of the twentieth century and the ancient Christian ascetic traditions of the desert fathers and mothers. For Bede the life of prayer is essentially a 'reordering' of the unconscious through the reflection of God's love: 'The point is that though these sins (Pride, Lust etc) are largely unconscious: our will has consented to them. This is the mystery of original sin'. Much of the life of prayer then, becomes for Bede, a purification of the unconscious on this radical level:

> We are all by nature under the power of these forces of the unconscious… these forces may be kept down, to some extent a kind of balance established, and that is the normal human condition, but it is very inadequate. (Griffiths, 2005: 4)

Struggling with the forces of the unconscious we have two choices—to repress them or to give way to them in an undiscriminating fashion—'becoming slaves to passion'. The first option, so common in the West, represses these forces so much that we become slaves to them, in which case we are controlled by the all-controlling, all-powerful, all-knowing ego. 'The average Christian' says Bede, 'simply represses the unconscious like everyone else and lives from their will and reason'. However, in baptism in Christ we have entered the deepest depths of the unconscious to allow their purification:

> It is Christ alone who can set us free from the unconscious. Baptism is a descent beneath the waters, a conflict with Satan (in which the soul is mystically identified with Christ) in which the daemonic powers are defeated and the healing powers of the unconscious are realised to give birth to new life. (Griffiths, 2005: 6)

This, for Bede, is what should happen in our Christian life—'The Holy Spirit should penetrate to the depth of the unconscious to the ultimate root of being, and transform us.'

As a practising psychotherapist I can attest to the truth of Bede's words in my daily dealings with clients. So many of us, especially in the West, lock up the forces of the unconscious and are terrified of opening up their contents (often with good reason), alternatively we see around us total unconscious 'acting out' of the destructive unconscious forces of the psyche. The Life of Christ penetrating into the darkest depths of the unconscious can bring liberation and healing in a most unexpected and profound way. The goal, following Bede, is to bring about a marriage of the conscious and unconscious, the male and female, animus and anima in which each is preserved and reintegrated in Christ.

Examining the lives of such spiritual masters as Thomas Merton and Bede Griffiths we see exactly this 'reintegration of the self in

Christ' through marriage of different poles of the self. Merton, living from the unconscious as a young man embraces the hard ethical demands of the Christian life when he enters the Trappist monastery of Gethsemani (as does Bede when he enters Prinknash), only with age and experience realising that the hard edges of ego-control have to be surrendered to allow a softer entrance of the spirit into all aspects of the self, bringing about what Blake calls the 'marriage of heaven and earth' (See Tyler, 2000).

In contemporary terms, then, we can see John's 'natural appetites' as equivalent to the Freudian or Jungian 'unconscious', whereas the 'voluntary appetites' are equivalent to conscious choices arising out of deeper unconscious motivations. Such motivations are, for John, deeply embedded in the psyche and, no matter whether fine or gross, they can hinder spiritual progress:

> If one small crack in a pitcher goes unrepaired, the damage will be enough to cause all the liquid to leak out… Accordingly, one imperfection leads to another, and these to still more. You will scarcely ever find a person negligent in the conquering of one appetite who will not have many others flowing from the identical weakness and imperfection caused by this one appetite. Such persons, consequently, are ever faltering along the road. We have witnessed many persons, whom God was favoring with much progress in detachment and freedom, fall from happiness and stability in their spiritual exercises and end up losing everything merely because they began to indulge in some slight attachment to conversation and friendship under the appearance of good. For by this attachment they gradually emptied themselves of both holy solitude and the spirit and joy of God. All this happened because they did not put a stop to their initial satisfaction and sensitive pleasure, and preserve themselves for God in solitude. A 1.11.5

Which leads to John's famous list of exhortations to the *'mas dificil'/'the most difficult'* which he illustrated on the map of Mount Carmel he would draw for his penitents:

> To reach satisfaction in all
> desire satisfaction in nothing.

To come to possess all
desire the possession of nothing.
To arrive at being all
desire to be nothing.
To come to the knowledge of all
desire the knowledge of nothing.

To come to enjoy what you have not
you must go by a way in which you enjoy not.
To come to the knowledge you have not
you must go by a way in which you know not.
To come to the possession you have not
you must go by a way in which you possess not.
To come to be what you are not
you must go by a way in which you are not.

A 1.13.11

Yet, as ever in his approach, John counsels two approaches to this steep and rugged path to perfection. First, that we should not despair in thinking about the path, but rather consider a practical approach to how these desires can be redirected. And secondly, that we take the same gentleness and pastoral sensitivity to the ascent which he himself took in his own dealings with penitents. Thus in A 1.13 he counsels four methods for 'redirection of the appetites'.

The first is derived from the classic Thomist position described above. We must strive in all our actions and habits to 'imitate Christ' at all times. Thomas stresses that we should adopt the *habitus* (or as Kenny translates it 'disposition') of Christ, so that more and more in an unthinking (unconscious) fashion we adopt the ways and manner of living of Christ 'by bringing your life into conformity with his'.[76]

Secondly, 'through love of Christ' we must renounce any sensory satisfaction that is 'not purely for the honour and glory of God'. In modern computer jargon: 'garbage in, garbage out'. The twentieth-century Jesuit and spiritual director, Anthony de Mello, suggested that at the end of the day before bed we should refrain from watching rubbish TV or reading trashy novels. As he says, if we put rubbish into the mind and soul we will get rubbish out.[77] Likewise, John suggests, we should choose to take in through our hearts and minds that which is conducive to creating greater peace and harmony in the self rather than exhaustion, fear and distraction.

This leads to the adoption of the next set of John's maxims for purification of the appetites:

Endeavor to be inclined always:
not to the easiest, but to the most difficult;
not to the most delightful, but to the most distasteful;
not to the most gratifying, but to the less pleasant;
not to what means rest for you, but to hard work;
not to the consoling, but to the unconsoling;
not to the most, but to the least;
not to the highest and most precious, but to the lowest and most despised;
not to wanting something, but to wanting nothing.

Do not go about looking for the best of temporal things, but for the worst, and, for Christ, desire to enter into complete nakedness, emptiness, and poverty in everything in the world. A 1.13.6

Yet, over and above his seemingly harsh counsel is John's gentle exhortation that the end to which we strive, the redirection of the appetites, will only be achieved through 'the other stronger love' that comes from God:

A love of pleasure, and attachment to it, usually fires the will toward the enjoyment of things that give pleasure. A more intense enkindling of another, better love (*otra inflamación mayor de otro amor major*), (love of the soul's Bridegroom) is necessary for the vanquishing of the appetites and the denial of this pleasure. By finding satisfaction and strength in this love, it will have the courage and constancy to readily deny all other appetites. The love of its Bridegroom is not the only requisite for conquering the strength of the sensitive appetites; an enkindling with urgent longings of love is also necessary. For the sensory appetites are moved and attracted toward sensory objects with such cravings that if the spiritual part of the soul is not fired with other, more urgent longings for spiritual things, the soul will be able neither to overcome the yoke of nature nor to enter the night of sense; nor will it have the courage to live in the darkness of all things by denying its appetites for them. A 1.14.2

As we saw in Chapter Four, John recognises in profound insight here that only by this *otra inflamación mayor* can we be moved to tackle the steep and rough ascent of Mount Carmel which is the redirection of the appetites. We do not fight the will or the 'love of pleasure' (Freud's 'pleasure principle') rather we strive

to cultivate the 'other, better love' which will ultimately lead our appetites back to their true home in God.

To conclude, contrary to many popular misconceptions of John's doctrine, he does not disparage the things of the world but rather our attitude to them. In as much as we are ensnared and enslaved (like a bird, he says, with its leg held by a thin wire, unable to fly) we will never be able to find the freedom we desire. A brush of the wing, he says, is necessary to remove these disordered appetites.

John's counsel of non-attachment is a counsel for redirection of the will, and by so doing, a working on the deepest levels of unconscious desire and attachment. A reordering of self away from a centre of gravity based on the hungry ego and its insatiable demand but towards the eternal freedom and love that is life in peace with Christ. For John, negation is no end in itself as suggested by the commentators we have surveyed who want to place John's negation alongside Sufi or Buddhist negation, but rather it is a negation which arises from the 'other stronger love' of God. This, for John, is the only process that will ultimately lead us to the 'place we know not', which for John is the place of the theological virtue of faith.

Conclusions—John and Islam

This chapter has explored some of the problems that arise when John's writings are too easily melded with those of other traditions, especially in this case, those of Islam and Buddhism. In fact, I would argue that an oversimplified direct melding of one onto the other will lead to misconceptions of both John's writing and the writings of Islam or Buddhism.

We began the chapter by mentioning the pioneering work of Asín Palacios. Before we finish it is worth considering one final dilemma posed by him. We have taken time here to look at alleged similarities between John's doctrine of negation and that of *fanā* in the Sufi tradition. Following on from Asín's work the more recent Puertan Rican scholar Luce López Baralt has similarly tried to trace Islamic origins to a whole selection of tropes and metaphors in John's writing. Apart from the 'dark night' she traces Islamic antecedents in her *San Juan de La Cruz y el Islam* (López Baralt, 1990) for the metaphor of the 'solitary bird' which occurs in *The Spiritual Canticle* (In the commentary to verses 14–15 and 24) and perhaps expounded in the lost work *Las propiedades del pájaro solitario* (see Chapters One and Three); Wine and Mystical Intoxication (again in *The Spiritual Canticle*); The Lamps of Fire in *The Living Flame of Love*; Water and the Mystical Interior Fountain (most notably in the poem *La Fuente*); The Ascent of the Mountain; Ascetic Combat; The Soul as Mystical Garden and The Lilies of Forgetting (At the conclusion of *The Dark Night*) (See López Baralt, 1990: 227–283). To successfully prove an influence in all of these cases López Baralt must demonstrate that:

1 There are clear Muslim/Sufi antecedents for each metaphor

2 John is using them in a way similar to this tradition

3 John could not have got them from similar Christian sources

4 There is a plausible means by which the transfer could have been effected from the Islamic tradition to John.

Let us look at each in turn:

We have seen that for Asín Palacios the main Islamic antecedent for John must come from the North African/Andalusian Sufi tradition of the Shadilites. In this tradition, especially in the writings of Ibn Abbad, there are, we have seen, certain notions that superficially appear similar to John's notion of 'negation'. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, the use to which John is putting his metaphor is sufficiently different from that of the Sufis to enable us to argue here that such an apparent connection as posited by Asín Palacios and López Baralt is unjustified by the evidence. In the case of the other metaphors it is notable that in her works López Baralt mostly cites examples from the Persian Sufi tradition rather than from the North African/Andalusian scene. If we take the bird metaphor for example, we find that there is a rich tradition of its use in the Sufi tradition but this is invariably in the Persian tradition of writers such as ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazzali and most famously 'Attār in his immortal *Conference of the Birds/Manīq al-?aīr*. For as López Baralt herself admits, there is a paucity of sources for metaphors such as these in the North African/Andalusian Arabic sources. For her 'this is one more enigma in a long list of enigmas surrounding the work of the saint' (López Baralt, 1992: 87) but it does not diminish the fact that until convincing Arabic links that are geographically closer to John are found the connection is necessarily hard to make.

Secondly, the arguments of this chapter have demonstrated that in the case of the *Dark Night of the Soul/ Ascent of Mount Carmel* at least, John is manifestly not using the metaphor in the way the Sufis are. We could cite other examples López uses such as when she compares John's use of the negative appetites to the Sufi view of the lower *nafs* of the soul (See López Baralt, 1990: 277–283). Again, as we have demonstrated

here John is using the notion of lower appetites directly as part of his distinctively Christian anthropology and is no way suggestive of the Sufi notion of *nafs*.

Thirdly, López rightly recognises that there are sufficient Christian medieval antecedents for many of the metaphors John employs to suggest we should look for Christian sources rather than Muslim sources as more probable, and easily accessible sources for John's metaphors.[78] As we have seen John studied the Christian mystical literature available in some depth at Salamanca and Alcalá and it is no surprise to find here most if not all of the key metaphors López mentions. We have also pointed out throughout this book John's debt to the early Christian desert tradition, as this of course would have influenced the Islamic tradition (as well as the common Platonic sources we mentioned earlier) it may be more helpful to look for common ancestry between the two late medieval traditions that antedates their separate evolution.

Finally, of all the arguments against López Baralts's (and Asín Palacios's) position the most difficult is probably the last point. If we do see parallels between John's poetry and that of certain Muslim antecedents and if we do find similar usage, the question arises: how could John have got hold of these sources? Brenan, for one, is completely dismissive of the notion:

> The idea, sometimes given credence today, that a Spaniard of those times could have seen any merit in the religion of Islam or in its methods of mental prayer seems to me entirely unacceptable. Nor had any of their books been translated into Spanish. (Brenan, 1973: 56)

For all his learning, John did not speak or read Arabic, and as Brenan states, none of these sources were available in Spanish or Latin. So how could John have got hold of them?

The most obvious candidate for this, and the one that Asín Palacios suggests may be the point of transfer, is through the lingering convert Muslim or *morisco* community that remained in Spain after the fall of Granada in 1492 and before the final expulsion of all *moriscos* from Spain in 1609 (see Caro Baroja, 1976). The Edicts of 1501, 1502, 1524 and 1526 had forbidden any Islamic religious practices in the Spanish realm and the Edict of 1567 finally prohibited the use of written or spoken Arabic and the possession of any Arabic books of 'any kind or quality whatsoever' (Arenal, 1975: 47). However despite these pressures, as López Baralt has demonstrated, the *moriscos* were able to write in a cryptic language, using Arabic characters but in a romance language such as Spanish or Portugese. This body of literature is termed *aljamiado* literature. Even from her extensive study of the *morisco alijamiado* literature she has to conclude that what survives of Arabic and Muslim culture is a pale shadow of the 'glory days' of the Medieval *Al Andalus*:

> These crypto-Muslims, who were literally dying out as the theologians of Islam—their religious fanaticism must not deceive us, no matter how sincere it may have been—, were gradually losing the rich and complex linguistic resources of their language, the vehicle of the symbols of their theology and the Muslim mysticism that had gone before them. (López Baralt, 1992: 182)

Brenan (1973: 56) hints that the Muslim Sufi tradition lived on alive and vibrant at the time that John was in Granada:

> As a point of curiosity it may be observed that there lived at the time at the Puerta de Elvira, only a few yards from the Carmelite convent, an old muslim *beata* or holy woman, a follower of the great Sufi mystic Al-Gazzali, who practised much the same sort of imageless prayer or contemplation that Juan de la Cruz did. (Brenan, 1973: 56)

Sadly, when questioned later by López Baralt on the origin of this information Brenan stated he could not recall his sources and had no record of the enquiry (Baralt, 1990: 286). The novelist and arabist Luis Antonio de Vega in his *San Juan de la Cruz. Sue Vida, Sus mejores páginas, Su época* (1961) composes an imaginary meeting between the two mystics which, López suggests, may have influenced Brenan's supposition. The problem, as she reveals, is that the supposed chronology is wrong: the main source for the 'Mora' is the *Tafçira* of the Mancebo or Young Man of Arévalo (See Harvey, 1958, 1967): a *morisco* gentleman who was known to be conversant in Arabic, Hebrew, Greek and Latin. On the eve of a tour of Mecca the Young Man visits centres of hidden Islamic culture in Spain, including a visit to *La Mora*, the 'old Moorish woman of Úbeda' who lives in Granada. Despite the woman's 'rustic and awkward speech' 'because of their tone of vulgarity' (Ribera and Asín Palacios, 1912: 224) the Young Man sees the old woman as having a mastery of the Qu'ran. However, on this López Baralt is sceptical when she comments:

> Her Koranic interpretations are limited to more or less forced (and to us quite grammatically and lexically obscure) prophecies on the fall of Islam in Spain, a subject which was a true obsession for these poor souls as their very identity was being stripped from them. (López Baralt, 1992: 187)

In addition to the weakness of learning displayed by the *Mora* López Baralt points out that certain other facts make it difficult to find contemporaneity between John and the *Mora*. As we have seen by the time John was in Granada, the use of Arabic was outlawed. In addition, she has knowledge of Muslim rites

which were prohibited in the pragmatics of 1501, 1502, 1524 and 1526. The *Mora* laments the fall of Granada in her account, but if, as she claims, she is 93, then if she was alive in 1582 when John was in Granada she would have been three at the time of the fall of Granada, surely too young to remember any of the events. More significantly, as López points out, is the fact that she does not mention the expulsion of the *moriscos* from Granada after the Alpujarras wars of 1570 and 1571, the so-called great *saca*. Harvey in his study of the date of the *Tafçira* from internal evidence places it around 1533/34, at the latest 1535. From all this López reluctantly concludes:

> It would have been difficult for the enigmatic *Mora* of Úbeda and her 'biographer', the Young Man of Arévalo, to have coincided chronologically with Saint John and his nuns in Granada. The *alijamiado-morisco* literature explored to date neither chronologically nor culturally confirms the suppositions of the Master Asín Palacios. (López Baralt, 1990: 328)

Therefore, we have to reluctantly conclude that the *morisco* population of late sixteenth century Spain could not have been the cultural transmitter of any supposed Muslim influences between Islam and John. Until such a 'smoking gun' is found it will be difficult to take the arguments regarding supposed Islamic influence on John onto any further significant level.

7

John for Today: Pastoral Theologian and Spiritual Director

In the evening you will be examined in love
(Sayings of Light and Love: 60)
Where there is no love, put love in and you will draw out love
(Letter to Madre María de la Encarnación, 6th July 1591)

One of the main themes of this book has been that John offers new avenues and means of exploring Christian discipleship and practice that make him uniquely qualified to speak to the present generation. It has been argued that this 'myriad minded man': theologian, mystic, artist, psychologist and initiator of dialogue, has something to offer to today's world. We have seen that in his approach to the Christian life theology, philosophy, art, psychology, science and religious experience all combine to enable the reader to discover who they are *really*. Accordingly in this final chapter I shall bring together some of the threads of this book as we finally examine John's advice for living the Christian life, that is, we treat John as pastoral or practical theologian.

We have heard throughout the book of numerous instances of John's ability to empathise with those to whom he ministered during his life and how much of this arose from his experiences as a young man in the Plague hospital of Medina. We have also argued that John finds in the medieval tradition of *theologia mystica* taught at Salamanca University a mode of expression uniquely suited to his own purposes—that is, developing a theology of the affect and the heart.

In this respect I would describe John's work in this area as coming under the label of 'pastoral theology'. In recent years pastoral theology has been seen as an enterprise within systematic theology in which the study of human nature is pursued in conscious interaction with the behavioural and human sciences, in particular sociology and psychology. Great advances in these disciplines in the last few decades has meant that theology has had to engage with a more anthropological view of the human person (see Lartey, 2000 and Campbell, 2000). Pastoral theology therefore represents the continual need for theology to engage with the emerging disciplines of each new generation in the manner in which we described in Chapter Four. We have seen how John stresses in his writing that the Christian engagement with God should involve 'the sciences, Sacred Scripture and experience' (A 1.2), thus opening up the possibility for such engagement with the whole human person in ways explored during this book. He is immensely practical and sees theology as something to be practised for a purpose. This purpose is to bring ourselves and the world to a love of God their creator. As a Carmelite sister said to me in Ávila recently '*La spiritualidad Carmelita es por todo el mundo*': 'Carmelite spirituality is for the whole world'.[79] John wants us to draw on our experience through interpretation of the bible in the light of contemporary knowledge and wisdom. In our own case this would often be psychological knowledge but I like to think that he would have been as much at home with scientists in the contemporary world from the evidence of his great love of nature, biology, astronomy and a natural curiosity towards the created order.

Ballard and Pritchard (2006: 81) make a distinction between pastoral theology as 'one of a cluster of disciplines each of which contributes to the theological enterprise' and 'a particular way of doing theology that should inform and influence all theology as an essentially practical activity.' For the rest of this chapter we will be particularly concerned with the latter and how pastoral theology can inform the wider discourse of theology through practical reflection on experience. I will illustrate this by discussing one practical example of John's teaching arising from reflection on practice and leading to a theologically nuanced position held in the light of practice: John's reflection on spiritual direction or soul guidance.

Spiritual Guidance/Direction according to St John

Before talking about the role of the 'spiritual director' it is worth pointing out that I use the label of 'spiritual director' largely out of convenience—we could equally refer to the *pneumatikos pater/mater*, the accompanier, the *Anam Cara* (literally 'Soul Friend', see Leech, 1986, 2001 and O'Donohue, 2008) or the spiritual guide. Kenneth Leech sums it up as 'the name given to a personal relationship between two people in which one assists the other to grow in the spiritual life'. Spiritual direction, counselling and psychotherapy are all concerned in creating a helping relationship which has at its heart the facilitation of growth and transformation of the client/directee/pilgrim.[80] In all these interactions one person is putting certain knowledge and skills at the service of another, generally speaking today this is through one-to-one meetings although group forms of discernment may also be used. Before discussing John's account of spiritual direction it is important to bear in mind that much that passes as spiritual direction today is directly influenced by the psychological and counselling movements of the mid twentieth century that we discussed in Chapter Four.

Central to the Christian tradition of spiritual direction is *diakresis* or discernment, the key text being from the First Letter of Saint John: 'Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have come into the world' (1 John, 4.1). The process of discernment or testing of Spirits was already well established in the tradition but it was St Ignatius of Loyola who famously refined and systematised the process in his *Spiritual Exercises* of the mid-sixteenth century. Throughout Ignatius's guidelines there are two underlying provisos—that we must direct the core and centre of our being to God's 'praise, reverence and service' and that we should constantly examine the life of prayer and Christian life in a gentle spirit of wisdom. Throughout, however, he emphasises that this is best done through the medium of conversations with another Christian (as he sometimes calls it 'talking seriously about serious things').

As we have seen John was nurtured within the environment of the Jesuit college of Medina and so would have been familiar with the ethos and training of Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*. Like Ignatius he cherishes 'discernment' or, as he terms it, *discreción*, in the spiritual director and realises that this special commodity is at the heart of spiritual direction (See A 2.18). Unlike Ignatius, however, central to John's conception of the right mode of practice of the spiritual director is an ability to perceive the need not to become attached to spiritual 'goods' on behalf of either the director or the directee.

The clearest exposition of John's understanding of spiritual direction is to be found in Book Three of *The Living Flame of Love*. As we saw in Chapter Two, John's basic spiritual anthropology is that we need to 'excavate the caverns of the heart' to allow God's Holy Spirit to act in us. This process, often painful, is the basis of the Christian journey and the 'wound' on which everything else is predicated. It is the sublime wounding of the Spirit which touches us at the deepest centre or *fondo del alma* (see Howells, 2002: 47–51). Whilst this is happening we should remember that 'If a person is seeking God, his Beloved is seeking him much more' (LF 3.28). The basic human spiritual condition that John proposes is a dynamic one where we are running out to find God and God is running in to find us (see CB 1).

Therefore in all talk of spiritual direction we must constantly remember that 'God is the principal agent in this matter' (LF 3.29) who acts 'as a blind man's guide' to lead us to the 'place we know not' (A 1.13.11). As we saw in Chapters Two and Three John always remembers that ultimately we cannot *know God in God's self*, in this life at least, therefore there will always have to be a trust and letting go as we are led by God to that 'place we know not':

> God transcends the intellect and is incomprehensible and inaccessible to it. Hence while the intellect is understanding, it is not approaching God but withdrawing from him. It must withdraw from itself and from its knowledge so as to journey to God in faith, by believing and not understanding. In this way it reaches perfection, because it is joined to God by faith and not by any other means, and it reaches God more by not understanding than by understanding… thus it advances by darkening itself, for faith is darkness to the intellect. (LF 3.48)

Our Christian response to this ongoing love of God is, as far as possible, not to put any blocks in the way of this outpouring love. So, as well as avoiding obstacles put in the way by ourselves we should avoid, counsels John, obstacles put in the way by the Bad Spirit and by other people such as spiritual directors.

This then, is the first and foremost point that spiritual directors must observe according to John, they must not put anything in the way (including themselves) between the soul and God. The chief agent, says John, in spiritual direction is the Holy Spirit and all guides must never forget this (LF 3.46).

The quality of the Guide

John, as is common in the tradition to which he is heir, sees the spiritual directee as 'putting on' the nature of their guide from constant meetings with them so he attaches great importance to the quality and characteristics of the guide. The guide should be 'learned and discreet' (LF 3.30) as well as having experience. Knowledge and *discreción* (ie *diakresis*) are both important, however, he suggests, without

'experience of pure spirit' the guide will be useless. This immeadiately raises the bar according to the suitability of a director and it is no surprise that he adds that the directee will rarely find 'a guide accomplished as to all their needs' (LF 3.30).

As such guides are so rare John suggests that many guides will cause more harm than good to many souls:

> Not understanding the ways and properties of the spirit, they ordinarily make souls lose the unction of these delicate ointments with which the Holy Spirit anoints and prepares them for himself, and they instruct them in other inferior ways, serviceable only to beginners, which they themselves have used or read of somewhere. (LF 3.31)

John seems to suggest that there are many spiritual directors who can guide beginners at early stages but are insufficient for the higher stages. It is probably difficult for us to read these passages and to accept this model of direction, accustomed as many of us are to the more egalitarian 'counselling' model of direction discussed above. Is John being too elitist? Is his theology aimed only at the 'perfects' not at beginners?

Reading these passages it certainly seems as such. It may be that John's approach to spiritual direction has a particular emphasis towards those who have gone beyond what he calls 'the beginners stages' of prayer and to something he calls more advanced. The introduction of such 'spiritual stages' into spiritual and moral development is always a perilous one. Although the notion of the 'three ways' (ie. that the spiritual life can be divided into that of purification, illumination and union) has a long and venerable tradition (See Tyler, 2005) it is not without good reason that writers such as Rahner attacked the tendency to elitism that such models can foster (See Rahner, 1967). Accordingly, as we read John's accounts of the stages we need to remember this hermeneutic in our interpretation of them.

Yet, at the heart of John's writing on direction is the notion that at different times in the spiritual life different laws and rules apply. We come into difficulty when we adopt a 'one size fits all' approach to spiritual direction. This, John stresses, is spiritual death—to the director as well as the directee. In *The Living Flame* 3.59 he reminds us that 'God leads each one along different paths so that hardly one spirit will be found like another in even half its method of procedure' which really should be written up in large letters on a board before anyone who practises the art of spiritual direction. In spiritual guidance, he suggests, a certain slovenliness and apathy creeps in—'it has worked in the past so why shouldn't it work now'. A slovenliness, I would suggest, that arises from a lack of humility towards the 'mystical unknowing' we discussed in Chapter Three. John is always cognisant of the fact that spiritual direction is a 'mindless activity' and in the words of Meister Eckhart 'God's in, I'm out' (See Smith 2004). As the soul itself does not know what is happening, how, asks John, can the director possibly know? (LF 3.41):

> Since (God) is the supernatural artificer, he will construct supernaturally in each soul the edifice he desires, if you, director, will prepare it by striving to annihilate it in its natural operations and affections, which have neither the ability nor strength to build the supernatural edifice. The natural operations and affections at this time impede rather than help. It is your duty to prepare the soul, and God's office, as the Wise Man says, is to direct its path, that is, toward supernatural goods, through modes and ways understandable to neither you nor the soul. (LF 3.47)

As we saw in Chapter Five, John adheres to three spiritual rules regarding God's action in the soul:

1 God acts on the soul in an orderly fashion.
2 God acts gently on the soul.
3 God instructs us according to the state of our soul.

With regard to spiritual direction John is constantly advising the director to keep these three rules before their eyes at all times, knowing that God can only act and be received by someone in so far as they have the capacity to receive that action. However, throughout he continues to urge his charges to take on the steep ascent of Mount Carmel to reach the ultimate goal of *nada-todo* at the peak of the mountain:

> Wipe away, O spiritual soul, the dust, hairs, and stains, and cleanse your eye; and the bright sun will illumine you, and you will see clearly. Pacify the soul, draw it out, and liberate it from the yoke and slavery of its own weak operation, which is the captivity of Egypt (amounting to not much more than gathering straws for baking bricks). And, O spiritual master, guide it to the land of promise flowing with milk and honey. Behold that for this holy liberty and idleness of the children of God, God calls the soul to the desert, where it journeys festively clothed and adorned with gold and silver jewels, since it has now left Egypt and been despoiled of its riches. (LF 3.38)

Thus, as always with John, we have a paradox between the shining splendid goal that is placed before us and to which we should aspire alongside the sympathetic warmth of his acceptance of our fragile nature and our incompleteness at this time before the Lord. John does not take his eye off the ultimate prizes but always tempers his message with the warmth of a seasoned pastoral counsellor.

The ultimate aim of the director, then, for John is to lead the soul to greater 'solitude, tranquility, and freedom of spirit' (LF 3.46). This latter quality, 'freedom of spirit' is very much at the heart of John's whole theology and teaching on the life of the spirit:

> When the soul frees itself of all things and attains to emptiness and dispossession concerning them, which is equivalent to what it can do of itself, it is impossible that God fail to do his part by communicating himself to it, at least silently and secretly. It is more impossible than it would be for the sun not to shine on clear and uncluttered ground. As the sun rises in the morning and shines on your house so that its light may enter if you open the shutters, so God, who in watching over Israel does not doze or, still less, sleep, will enter the soul that is empty, and fill it with divine goods. (LF 3.46)

So then, John advises, if we would be a spiritual director the first and last qualification is to 'know thyself'. If we are more proficient at guiding people at the more meditative stages then we should stick to that. Dangers arise when we go beyond our competencies and think that we know about spiritual things of which we have little knowledge and experience (LF 3.58). Within it all we should ask ourselves 'are we holding on to spiritual directees?' 'are we feeding off them?'. If this is the case we should always be quick in finding someone else for them to work with for such a holding on to a soul is tantamount to depriving them of their spiritual freedom, which for John is the most heinous crime a spiritual director can commit:

> You endeavor to hold on to your penitents. But what is worse, you may by chance learn that one of them has consulted another (for perhaps you were not the suitable one to consult, or that person was led by God to another so as to learn what you did not teach), and you treat that penitent—I am ashamed to say it—with the very jealous quarrelsomeness we find among married couples. And this is not jealousy for the glory of God, but a jealousy motivated by your own pride and presumption or some other imperfection, for you should not assume that in turning from you this person turned from God. (LF 3.59)

Conclusions

One of the subtexts of this book has been 'What is theology?' and 'How is theology to be practised today?' By choosing John as an exemplar of how to practice theology we have made two claims:

First that theology is to be seen as a discipline that embraces the whole self: body, heart, mind and spirit.

And secondly, that a writer such as John is to be understood first and foremost as a *practical* theologian who gives us clear steps on how to deepen our relationship and involvement with the spiritual core of our lives.

This latter, he says, is achieved through engagement of the whole person. Yes, he says, the *intellectus* is important and must be cultivated (as we explored in Chapter Two). However, equally, as we saw in Chapter Three, we must recognise the limits of the intellect and appreciate the need to cultivate the affect—'the heart'—if we are to find the spiritual core we are seeking. In contemporary language this is usually referred to as the 'psychological' core of ourselves, and as we saw in Chapter Four, John offers sage and humane advice for developing ourselves as psycho-spiritual beings. In Chapter Five we saw that as well as through spiritual disciplines this affect can be cultivated through the disciplines of art, poetry and music. Such an approach, we argued in Chapter Six, allows us to dialogue with other truth claims whilst retaining the core character of a clear Christian approach. In this final chapter we have explored the nature of John's pastoral or practical theology and its implications for 'doing theology' today by concentrating on his advice for the spiritual guide. In doing so we have seen how this spiritual master offers a subtle path that challenges all our presuppositions whilst keeping in mind the need not to 'destroy the pot whilst we remove the rust'.[81]

Through it all we must not lose sight of the dynamism of John's message, the message of this most unlikely and surprising of saints. As Von Balthasar puts it:

> This is an adventure in the atmosphere of extreme secrecy—escaping to Sion from captivity in Babylon, by night, disguised, on a secret stair, not approaching by degrees, but dancing to the rhythm of nada-todo. (von Balthasar, 1986: 118)

Like John's leap onto the city walls of Toledo, high above the perilous cliffs of the Tajo, so, the saint says, the Christian life must be a similar leap of faith 'in darkness and unknown' as we take a deep breath, place our trust in God and let go into the full clear air alone at last and in terrifying wonder of God's loving embrace.

Acknowledgements

I have been living and working with the poems and writings of Saint John of the Cross for many years now, so it was a great pleasure when Robin Baird-Smith and Fr Brian Davies OP of *Continuum* asked me if I would be prepared to write this addition to their excellent *Outstanding Christian Thinkers* series and I thank them both for their confidence in my ability to fulfil this task.

Saint Teresa of Ávila's first editor, Fray Luis de León, realised that Teresa's works only made sense when read in the context of the community that she created: the Discalced Mothers and Fathers of Carmel. Although the work and thought for this book has been gestating for some time significant parts have been written whilst leading retreats with and for groups of Carmelites both in the UK and Spain. Without the help, insights, advice and support of the family of Carmel worldwide this book could not have been written and I accordingly dedicate it to this most special group.

At home I have received special inspiration from the kindness and peace of Boars Hill Carmelite Convent and would like to thank the community there, especially Fr James McCaffrey OCD for taking the time to read the manuscript and write a foreword. My thanks are due too to the Third Order Carmelites of South London for their enthusiasm.

In Spain, I would like to thank in particular the Prior, Fr Javier Sancho Fermín OCD, and community of the *Centro Internacional Teresiano Sanjuanista* at Ávila and the Prior, Fr Tito de la Cruz OCD, and community of the Toledo Carmel. A special thanks to Fr Junjun Agruda OCD for reading the manuscript and giving me so much encouragement.

Leading groups to Spain over the past ten years has been a great privilege and I would like to thank all my fellow participants and leaders, chief of course being Julienne McLean and Br Patrick Moore.

I am grateful to the Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington, for granting me permission to use extracts from Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez's translations of St John's writings.

My colleagues at St Mary's University College, Twickenham have shown great forebearance in enabling me to rehearse ideas and chase up strands of thought whilst on a practical level allowing me study time to complete the book. My thanks too to all my students and teachers for all their kindnesses and insights, especially Richard.

Nearer to home my family have always been supportive to this project as all others. Whilst writing the book we suffered the sudden and tragic loss of my brother Paul and I remember with affection his love and help to me over the years.

Finally, a special thanks to Ash, Nina, Hymie and Gill for all their support.

London

Feast of St John of the Cross

Bibliography

Sources

San Juan de La Cruz: Obras Completas. Ed. Lucinio Ruano de la Iglesia (2002). Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos

Obras de San Juan de La Cruz, Doctor de la Iglesia. Ed. P. Silverio de Santa Teresa. (1929–1931). Burgos: Biblioteca Mistica Carmelitana (5 Vols)

The Collected Works of St John of the Cross. Trans. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez (1979). Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies

The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross. Doctor of the Church. Trans. E. Allison Peers (1935). London: Burns Oates (3 Vols)

Abbreviations of Works of St John of the Cross

A = Ascent of Mount Carmel

CA = *Spiritual Canticle*—Redaction A

CB = *Spiritual Canticle*—Redaction B

DN = *Dark Night of the Soul*

LF = *The Living Flame of Love*

Primary Sources Abbreviations

BAC = Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos

BMC = Biblioteca Mistica Carmelitana

CH = *Celestial Hierarchy*, Dionysius

CUP = Cambridge University Press

DLT = Darton, Longman and Todd

Dion = *Dionysiaca*

DS = *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique, Doctrine et Histoire*. Eds M. Viller, F. Cavallera, J de Guibert, A. Rayez, A. Derville, P. Lamarche, A. Solignac, 1937—. Paris: Beauchesne

EH = *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Dionysius

GMT = *De Mistica Theologia*, Jean Gerson

ICS = Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington DC

MT = *De Mistica Theologia*, Dionysius

ODN = *On the Divine Names*, Dionysius

OUP = Oxford University Press

ST = *The Summa Theologiae*, St Thomas Aquinas

TA = *Tercer Abecedario Espiritual*, Francisco de Osuna

St Augustine of Hippo

Confessions. Trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin. London: Penguin, 1961

Augustine Baker

Book E. Ed. J. Clark. Analecta Cartusiana, 119: 18. Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg. 2002

Secretum. Ed. J. Clark. Analecta Cartusiana, 119: 7. Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg. 1997

St Benedict of Nursia

The Rule of St Benedict. Ed. T. Fry. Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press. 1982

Chrétien de Troyes

The Story of the Grail (Perceval) reprinted and translated by W. W. Kibler in *Arthurian Romances*. London: Penguin, 2004

Dionysius

Corpus Dionysiacum edited by Suchla, Heil and Ritter. Berlin, 1990.

Dionysiaca: Recueil donnat L'ensemble des traditions latines des ouvrages attributes au Denys de l'Aréopage. Ed. M. Chevalier. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer. 1937–50

Opera Veteris ac novae translationis cum Hugonis, Alberti, Thomae et aliorum. Strassbourg 1502 (Salisbury Cathedral A 5.8, 1502)

A Thirteenth-Century Textbook of Mystical Theology at the University of Paris. The *Mystical Theology* of Dionysius the Areopagite in Eriugena's Latin Translation with the Scholia translated by Anastasius the Librarian and Excerpts from Eriugena's *Periphyseon*. Ed. and Trans. by L. M. Harrington. Paris: Peeters, 2004

Mystical Theology: The Glosses by Thomas Gallus and the Commentary of Robert Grosseteste on De Mystica Theologia. Ed. and Trans. by J. McEvoy. Paris: Peeters, 2003

Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works. Trans. C. Luibheid and P. Rorem. New York: Paulist. 1987

Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and Mystical Theology and Denis Hid Divinity edited by McCann. London: Burns and Oates, 1924

Evagrius Pontus

Ad Monachos. Trans. J. Driscoll. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 2003

Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos, Chapters on Prayer. Trans. John Eudes Bamberger. Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1981

Évagre le Pontique: traité pratique ou le Moine. Ed. A. & C. Guillaumont. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971

Francisco de Osuna

Tercer Abecedario Espiritual de Francisco de Osuna. Ed. S. López Santidrián. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores

Cristianos, 1998
Francisco de Osuna: The Third Spiritual Alphabet. Trans. M. Giles. New York: Paulist, 1981

St Ignatius Loyola

The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works. Ed. G. E. Ganss. NJ: Paulist, 1991

Jean Gerson

Ioannis Carlerii de Gerson De Mystica Theologia. Ed. A. Combes. Lugano: Thesaurus Mundi, 1958
Jean Gerson: Early Works. Trans. B. McGuire. New York: Paulist, 1998
De Theologia mystica. Unpublished translation by B. McGuire. Made available by permission of the translator.

John Baconthorpe

Quodlibeta. Ed. Marcus Antonius Zimara. Venice, 1527

St Teresa of Ávila

Obras Completas de Santa Teresa de Jésus. Ed. Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink, 9th ed. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1997
Santa Teresa Obras Completas. Ed. T. Alvarez, 10th ed. Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 1998
The Collected Works of St Teresa of Avila. Trans. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez. 3 Vols. Vol. 1: 2nd ed.; Vols 2 & 3; 1st ed. Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1980–87 (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez CW)
The Complete Works of St Teresa of Jesus. Trans. E. Allison Peers. 3 Vols. London: Sheed and Ward, 1946
The Letters of St Teresa of Jesus. Trans. E. Allison Peers. Maryland, Westminster: Newman Press, 1951.

St Thomas Aquinas

Summa Theologiae. Ed. T. Gilbey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006

William Blake

The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake. Ed. D. Erdman. San Francisco: University of California Press, 2008

All scripture quotes are from the NRSV or Jerusalem Bible unless otherwise stated.

Secondary Works

Andrés Martín, M. (1991) 'La teologia en Salamanca durante los estudios de San Juan de la Cruz (1560–1570)' in *Juan de la Cruz, Espiritu de Llama*. Ed. O.Steggink. Kampen: Kok Pharos Antolín, F. (1987) 'La Limpieza de Sangre en la Reforma Teresiana. Un Documento Desconocido' in *Revista de Espiritualidad*, 46, 1987

Arenal, M. (1975) *Los moriscos*. Madrid: Nacional Asín Palacios, M. (1933) 'Un precursor hispanomusulmán de San Juan de la Cruz' in *Al-Andalus* 1 (1933), trans. H. W. Yoder and E. H. Douglas as *Saint John of the Cross and Islam*, (1981) New York: Vantage Press

Astley, J. (2002) *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology*. Aldershot: Ashgate

Auden, W. H. (1979) *Selected Poems*, London: Faber and Faber (1973) 'An Odd Ball in an Odd Country at an Odd Time', Review of Gerald Brenan's *St John of the Cross: His Life and Poetry* in *The New York Review of Books, Vol.* 20: 17, 1st November 1973

Ballard, P. and Pritchard, J. (2006) *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*. London: SPCK

Bell, D. N. (1978) 'Love and Charity in the Commentary on the *Song of Songs* of Thomas the Cistercian' in *Citeaux* 29 (1978)

A Benedictine of Stanbrook (1954) *Medieval Mystical Tradition and Saint John of the Cross*. London: Burns and Oates

Bengoechea, I. (2000) 'María Virgen, Santa' in *Diccionario de San Juan de La Cruz*. Ed. E. Pacho. Burgos: Monte Carmelo Bilinkoff, J. (1989) *The Avila of Saint Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth-Century City*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press Bord, A. (1971) *Mémoire et espérance chez Jean de la Croix*. Biblioteque de Spiritualité 8. Paris: Beauchesne.

Brenan, G (1973) *St John of the Cross: His Life and Poetry*. Cambridge: CUP

Brown, P. (1990) *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. Columbia: Columbia University Press

Campbell, A. (2000) 'The Nature of Practical Theology' in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*. Ed. J. Woodward and S. Pattison. Oxford: Blackwell Campbell, R. (1951) *Poems of St John of the Cross*. London: Harvill Caro Baroja, J. (1976) *Los moriscos del reino de Granada*. Madrid: Istmo

Castro, A. (1971) *The Spaniards: An Introduction to Their History*, trans. W. King and S. Margaretten. Berkeley: University of California Press

Chase, S. (2003) *Contemplation and Compassion: The Victorine Tradition*. London: DLT Chevallier, P. (1930) *Le 'Cantique spirituel' de Saint Jean de la Croix*. Paris: Desclée (1957) 'Influence du Pseudo-Denys en Occident' in DS III, pp. 318–323

Chowning, D. (2000) 'Free to Love: Negation in the Doctrine of John of the Cross' in Carmelite Studies 6

Chryssavgis, J. (2003) *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*. Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom

Clark, J. (2003) *Introduction and Notes to Fr Augustine Baker OSB Secretum*. Analecta Cartusiana, 119:20. Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg.

Crisógono de Jésus (1958) *Vida de San Juan de La Cruz*. Trans. as 'The Life of St John of the Cross' by K. Pond. London: Longmans Culligan, K. (1983) *Saint John of the Cross and Spiritual Direction*. Dublin: Carmelite Centre of Spirituality

Culligan, K., Meadow, M., Chowning, O. (1994) *Purifying the Heart: Buddhist Insight Meditation for Christians*. New York: Crossroad. De Andía, Y. (1993) 'San Juan de la Cruz y la "Teología Mística" de "San Dionisio"' in *Actas del Congreso Internacional Sanjuanista*. Ed. A. García Simón (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León)

De Vega, L. A. (1961) *San Juan de la Cruz. Sue Vida, Sus mejores páginas, Su época*. Madrid Dámaso Alonso, D. (1966) *La Poesía de San Juan de la Cruz*. Madrid: Aguilar Dondaine, H. (1953) *Le Corpus dionysien de l'université de Paris au XIIIe siècle*. Rome: Edizioni di Storia et Letteratura Dubourg, P. (1927) 'La Date de la *Theologia Mystica*' in *Revue d'ascetique et de mystique* 8 (1927), pp. 156–61

Dumeige, G. (1952) *Richard de Saint-Victor et l'idée chrétienne de l'amour*. Paris

Duvivier, R. (1971) *La Genèse du 'Cantique spirituel' de Saint Jean de la Croix*. Paris

Egan, K. (2000) 'Contemplation in "The Spiritual Canticle"; The Program of Dark Night: Education for Beauty' in *Carmel and Contemplation*. Ed K. Culligan and R. Jordan. Washington: ICS

Egido, T. (1990) *Contexto Historico de San Juan de La Cruz* in Ruiz (ed) *Experiencia y Pensamiento en San Juan de La Cruz*. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad

P. Florencio del Niño Jesús (1924) *El Monte Carmelo: Tradiciones e Historia de La Santa Montaña, de la Virgen del Carmen y De La Orden Carmelitana y la Luz do Los Monumentos y Documentos*. Madrid: Mensajero de Santa Teresa

Flower, M. (1983) *Centred on Love: The Poems of St John of the Cross*. Australia: Varroville Carmel

Freud, S. (1915) 'Das Unbewusste' in *Das Ich und Das Es: Metapsychologishe Schriften*. Ed. A. Holder. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2007. English Translation by J. Strachey in *On Metapsychology—The Theory of Psychoanalysis*. The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 11. London: Penguin, 1991

Fuller, A. (1994) *Psychology and Religion*. Maryland: Littlefield Adams García Simón, A. Ed (1993) *Actas del Congreso Internacional Sanjuanista* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León)

Garrigou-Lagrange, R. (1937/1958) *Christian Perfection and Contemplation According to St Thomas Aquinas and St John of the Cross*. Translated by M. Timothea Doyle. London: Herder George, D. H. (1980) *Blake and Freud*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Giordano, S. (1995) *Carmel in the Holy Land: From Its Beginnings to the Present Day*. Arenzano: Il Messaggero di Gesu Bambino González y González, N. (1976) *El Monasterio de la Encarnación de Ávila*. Ávila: Caja Central de Ahorros y Préstamos

Goytisola, J. (1988) *Las Virtudes del pájaro solitario*, Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral Green, T. (1979) *When the Well Runs Dry: Prayers Beyond the Beginnings*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria

Gregorio de Jesús Crucificado (1950) 'La muerte de amor de María a la luz de San Juan de La Cruz' in *Estudios Marianos* 9, 1950 Griffiths, B. (1992) *The New Creation in Christ: Christian Meditation and Community*. London: DLT

(2005) 'Letter to Dr Mary Allen' reprinted in *The Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter*. March 2005. Vol. 8: 1 Grof, S. & Grof, C. (1989) *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press

Harmless, W. (2004) *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*. Oxford: OUP Harvey, L. P. (1958) 'Un manuscrito aljimado de la Universidad de Cambridge' in *Al-Andalus*, XXIII, 1958 (1967) 'Castilian Mancebo as a Calque of Arabic 'Abd, or How El Mancebo de Arévalo Got His Name' in *Modern Philology* LXV, 1967

Haskins, C. H. (1957) *The Renaissance of the 12th Century*. New York: Meridian

Howells, E. (2002) *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila: Mystical Knowing and Selfhood*. New York: Crossroad

Inge, R. (1899) *Christian Mysticism*. London: Methuen Javelet, R. (1962) 'Thomas Gallus et Richard de Saint-Victor mystiques.' in *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 29/30. 1962/1963

John Paul II, Pope (1990) 'Master in the Faith: Apostolic Letter of His Holiness John Paul II for the Fourth Centenary of the Death of Saint John of the Cross' in *L'Osservatore Romano* 52, 24th December 1990

Johnson, R. (1997) *He: Understanding Masculine Psychology*. New York: Harper

(1998) *Balancing Heaven and Earth: A Memoir of Visions, Dreams and Realizations*. New York: HarperOne

Johnston, W. (1988) 'All and Nothing: St John of the Cross and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue' in *The Eastern Buddhist* 21: 2 (1991) *Letters to Contemplatives*. New York: Orbis Jung, C. G. (1921) *Psychologische Typen*, trans. as *Psychological Types* by H. G. Baynes and R. Hull. London: Routledge, 2001 Kember, N. (2007) *Hostage in Iraq*. London: James Lorimer Knowles, M. D. (1962) *The Evolution of Medieval Thought*. London: Longmans

(1975) 'The Influence of Pseudo-Dionysios on Western Mysticism' in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp*. Ed. P. Brooks. London: SCM

Lartey, E. (2000) 'Practical Theology as a Theological Form' in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*. Ed. J. Woodward and S. Pattison. Oxford: Blackwell Leech, K. (1986) *Spirituality and Pastoral Care*. London: Sheldon

(2001) *Soul Friend: Spiritual Direction in the Modern World*. Harrisburg PA: Morehouse

Lonsdale, D. (1992) *Dance to the Music of the Spirit*. London: DLT López-Baralt, L. (1990) *San Juan de la Cruz y el Islam*. Madrid: Hiperión

(1992) *Huellas del Islam in la literature española* trans. as *Islam in Spanish Literature From the Middle Ages to the Present*. Trans. A. Hurley. Leiden: Brill

Louth, A. (1989) *Denys the Areopagite*, London: Geoffrey Chapman Lozano, J. (1983) *Estudio Preliminar* to *San Juan de La Cruz: Poesía Completa*. Madrid: Taurus MacCulloch, D. (2003) *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490–1700*. London: Allen Lane Matter, E. A. (1990) *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Matthew, I. (1991) *The Knowledge and Consciousness of Christ in the Light of the Writings of St John of the Cross*. D.Phil. thesis submitted Oxford University, 1991

(1993) *To Find God: A Study of St John of the Cross*. Lectures given in London on audiotape. Oxford: Carmelite Book Service

(1995) *The Impact of God*. London: DLT

McEvoy, J. (2003) *Mystical Theology: The Glosses of Thomas Gallus and the Commentary of Robert Grosseteste on De Mystica Theologia*. Ed., with introduction. Paris: Peeters McGinn, B. (1991) *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian*

(1998) 'Thomas Gallus and Dionysian Mysticism' in *Studies in Spirituality* 8/1998

McGinn, C. (1989) 'Can we solve the mind-body problem?' Mind 98 (1989) reprinted in *Philosophy of Mind: A Guide and Anthology*. Ed J. Heil, Oxford: OUP, 2004

McGreal, W. (1999) *At the Fountain of Elijah: The Carmelite Tradition*. London: DLT

Morris, C. (1972) *The Discovery of the Individual 1050–1200*. London: SPCK

Muñoz Delgado, V. (1991) 'Filosofía, teología y humanidades en la Universidad de Salamanca durante los estudios de San Juan de la Cruz (1564–1568)' in *Juan de la Cruz, Espiritu de Llama*. Ed O. Steggink. Kampen: Kok Pharos

Nouwen, H. (1979) *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*. New York: Doubleday

Nugent, C. (1996) 'Satori in St John of the Cross' in *The Eastern Buddhist* 29:1

O'Donohue, J. (2008) *Anam Cara: Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World*. Ireland: Transworld Pacho, Eulogio de la Virgen del Carmen (1969) *San Juan de La Cruz y Sus Escritos*. Madrid: Ediciones Cristianidad.

(1986) *San Juan de la Cruz. Temas Fundamentales*. 2 vols. Burgos: Monte Carmelo ed. (2000) *Diccionario de San Juan de La Cruz*. Burgos: Monte Carmelo Payne, S. (2000) *The Influence of John of the Cross in the United States: A Preliminary Study* in *Carmelite Studies* VI. Washington: ICS. Quiroga, José de Jesús María (1628) *Historia de la vida y virtudes del Venerable Padre Fray Juan de La Cruz*. Brussels

Rahner, K. (1967) 'Reflections on the Problem of the Gradual Ascent to Christian Perfection' in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. III. Trans. E. Quinn. London: DLT

Ribera Tarragó, J. and Asín Palacios, M. (1912) *Manuscritos árabes y aljimiados de la Biblioteca de la Junta*. Madrid: Centro de Estudios Históricos.

Rodríguez-San Pedro Bezares, L. (1993) 'La Formación Universitaria de Juan de la Cruz' in *Actas del Congreso Internacional Sanjuanista*. Ed. A. García Simón (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León)

Rogers, C. (1995) *On Becoming a Person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Harcourt

Rohr, R. (2005) *From Wild Man to Wise Man: Reflections on Male Spirituality*. New York: St Anthony Messenger Press

Rorem, P. (1982) 'Iamblichus and the Anagogical Method in Pseudo-Dionysian Liturgical Theology' in *Studia Patristica*, Vol. 18 ed. Livingstone. Oxford: Pergamon
(1993) *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Ruiz, F. (1986) *Místico y maestro: San Juan de la Cruz*. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad. Ed. (1990) *Experiencia y Pensamiento en San Juan de la Cruz*. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad
Ed. (2000) *God Speaks in the Night*. Washington: ICS Smet, J. (1988) *The Carmelites*. (4 Vols) Illinois: Carmelite Spiritual Center.
(1997) 'The Carmelite Rule after 750 Years' in *Carmelus* 44: 11 Smith, C. (2004) *The Way of Paradox: Spiritual Life as Taught by Meister Eckhart*. London: DLT

Solignac, A. (1988) 'Sarrazin (Jean), traducteur du Pseudo-Denys' in DS, Fas XCI, pp. 351–355

Steggink, O. Ed (1991) *Juan de la Cruz, Espiritu de Llama: Estudios con occasion del cuatro centenario de su muerte (1591–1991)*. Kampen: Kok Pharos

Swietlicki, C. (1986) *Spanish Christian Cabala: The Works of Luis de León, Santa Teresa de Jesús and San Juan de la Cruz*. Missouri: University of Missouri Press

Théry, G. (1950–51) 'Documents concernant Jean Sarrazin réviseur de la traduction érigénienne du 'Corpus Dionysiacum'' in DS, Fas XCI, pp. 351–355

Thompson, C. (1977) *The Poet and the Mystic: A Study of the Cántico Espiritual of San Juan de La Cruz*. Oxford: OUP
(2002) *St John of the Cross: Songs in the Night*. London: SPCK

Turner, D. (1995) *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications

Tyler, P. M. (1997) *The Way of Ecstasy: Praying with St Teresa of Avila*. Norwich: Canterbury Press
(2000) 'Thomas Merton: Ikon of Commitment for the Postmodern Generation' in *The Way Supplement* 2000/98
(2005) 'The Triple Way' in *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. Ed. P. Sheldrake. London: SCM Valdivia Válor (1992) *Don Miguel Asín Palacios: Mística cristiana y mística musulmana*. Madrid: Hiperión Vélez de Cea, A. (2006) 'A New Direction for Comparative Studies of Buddhists and Christians: Evidence from Nāgārjuna and John of the Cross' in *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 26 (2006)

Verdejo López, M. (1984) *Proceso apostólico de Jaén: Beatificación y canonización de San Juan de La Cruz (Informaciones de 1617)*. Jaén. von Balthasar, H. U. (1961–1969) *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik*. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag) trans. 'The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetic' (1982–1989) ed. Fessio, J. and Riches, J. trans. Davies, O., Louth, A., Sayward, J., Simon, M., McNeil, B., McDonagh, F., Riches, J., Leiva-Merikakis, E. and Williams, R. Edinburgh: T and T Clarke von Ivánka, E. (1964) *Plato Christianus: Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter*. Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag Waaijman, K. (1999) *The Mystical Space of Carmel: A Commentary on the Carmelite Rule*. Trans. J. Vriend. Leuven: Peeters Welch, J. (1990) *When Gods Die: An Introduction to St John of the Cross*. New York: Paulist

Williams, R. (1990) *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St John of the Cross*. London: Darton Longman and Todd (2004) *Teresa of Avila*. London: Continuum Wilson, C. Ed (2006) *The Heirs of St Teresa of Ávila: Defenders and Disseminators of the Founding Mother's Legacy*. Carmelite Studies IX. Washington: ICS

Wojtyla, K. (1981) *Faith According to Saint John of the Cross*. San Francisco

Woodward, J. and Pattison S., ed. (2000) *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell

Zaragüeta y Bengoechea, J. (1952) *Necrología del Excmo. Sr. D. Miguel Asín Palacios* in *Anales de la Real Academia de Ciencias Morales y Políticas*. 2/1952. Madrid Zinn, G. A. (1979) *Richard of St Victor: The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, Book Three of the Trinity*. Trans. with Introduction. London: SPCK

Bloomsbury Academic
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square	1385 Broadway
London	New York
WC1B 3DP	NY 10018
UK	USA

www.bloomsbury.com

Bloomsbury is a registered trade mark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published 2010

© Peter M Tyler, 2010

Peter M Tyler has asserted his right under the Copyright,
Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury or the author.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-0-826-47560-2
PB: 978-0-8264-7561-9
ePUB: 978-1-4411-5772-0
ePDF: 978-1-4411-8878-6

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Footnotes

[1] See Teresa of Ávila, *The Way of Perfection/Camino de Perfección*, Ch. 1

[2] For one of the most comprehensive recent accounts of this period see MacCulloch (2003)

[3] Most notably by Roy Campbell (Campbell, 1951), but see also Flower (1983)

[4] From hereon we shall refer to the commentaries by initials: *The Dark Night of the Soul* (DN), *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (A), *The Spiritual Canticle, Redaction A* (CA), *The Spiritual Canticle, Redaction B* (CB) and *The Living Flame of Love* (LF). All Spanish references are from *San Juan de La Cruz: Obras Completas* ed. Lucinio Ruano de la Iglesia (2002) and English references are from either Kavanaugh and Rodriguez (1979), Allison Peers (1935) or my own translation. For more bibliographical details see bibliography.

[5] A particular form of Spanish 'illuminism', see article 'Alumbrados' Tyler (2005)

[6] I am indebted to Fr Clark for drawing this to my attention. See also *Book E* of Augustine Baker, p. 121.

[7] For a good account of this process see Williams, 2004

[8] These biographers would stress the presence of members of the de Yepes family amongst the Canons of Toledo Cathedral, in the Inquisition and the Hieronomite Order—known for its rigour of application of 'purity of blood'. As stated below, however, we shall see that much of this post-dated John's birth.

[9] Indeed, during the Middle Ages Toledo, ancestral home of both John and Teresa's families, had been regarded as 'the Jerusalem of the West' by Jews all over Europe and the Middle East. The expulsion in 1492 put an end to this when many of the 'Sephardic' Jews left Spain, often for the more welcoming Ottoman lands of North Africa and the Levant. One of these groups, the Jews of Salonika, still expressed sufficient Spanish Jewish culture for it to be recorded in the nineteen thirties shortly before they were swept away by Nazi extermination. Much of our knowledge of the culture of Medieval Jewish Spain comes from information collected from this community.

[10] In this account I am relying mainly on Crisógono's *Vida de San Juan de La Cruz*, the depositions of the processes for the canonisation of John made 40 years after his death and reprinted in P. Silverio de Santa Teresa *Obras de San Juan de la Cruz* as well as recent biographical sketches in Brenan (1973), Egido (1990), Ruiz (2000), Thompson (2003) and Rodríguez (2008)

[11] For good accounts of the reconstruction of John's studies see Rodríguez-San Pedro Bezares (1993), Andrés Martín (1991) and Muñoz Delgado (1991).

[12] In *The Living Flame* 4.4 John seems to accept Copernican theory which Salamanca was one of the first European Universities to accept. (See Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, 2003)

[13] For more on this see Howells (2002: 152): 'Today the battle lines remain drawn between Elizabeth Wilhelmsen in the Thomist camp and André Bord in the anti-Thomist, more Augustinian camp'.

[14] See Teresa of Ávila, *Libro de las Fundaciones/Book of the Foundations*, Chapter 3

[15] P. Florencio's book written before the troubles in the Holy Land in the middle of the 20th Century gives some fascinating details about the mutual respect between the 'dervish and sufi' communities of the Holy Mountain and the Carmelite Order. We shall return to this theme in Chapter Five.

[16] Bernard Oller in the late 14th Century wrote that 'good faith and prescription were sufficient for them' (Smet, 1988: 18)

[17] The association of being shoeless (*Descalzo*) with spiritual reform pre-dated John and Teresa. Teresa of Avila's great mentor, Peter of Alcantara was one of the most famous 'shoeless' Franciscans who were to shape so much of Spanish 16th Century spirituality. The possession of shoes was associated with wealth, akin to the English phrase for well-off people—'well heeled'. A number of commentators (eg Crisógono) refer to the un-Discalced Carmelites as 'Calced'. Conversations with un-Discalced Carmelites suggest that this term is not considered appropriate. Thus, throughout this book when I refer to the un-Discalced Carmelites I shall call them the Carmelites of the Ancient Observance, 'Mitigated Carmelites' or simply Carmelites. Teresa herself refers to these friars as 'of the cloth' (*del Paño*) or 'of the Observance', see for example, *El Libro de Las Fundaciones*, Ch. 13.

[18] As well as John, the group consisted of F. Antonio de Heredia, F. José de Cristo, who subsequently either died or left the reform and another 'infirm father' of whom we know nothing.

[19] Literally 'blessed ones'. These devout women, often widows, formed a spiritual network in pre-reformation Spain. In many ways their spirituality was akin to that of their Northern European

counterparts, the Beguines. Teresa was close to many *beatas* and in fact the Carmelite Convent she joined, the *Encarnación* in Ávila was originally founded as a beatorio by Doña Elvira González de Medina, one time concubine of a Canon of Ávila Cathedral, Don Nuño González del Aguila. Originally her house housed a community of some fourteen women living under the Carmelite Rule established in 1479 only to be given the deeds to the Jewish cemetery of Ávila in 1495 after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. The house was officially opened as a Carmelite convent in 1515, the year of Teresa's birth (See Bilinkoff, 1989: 41 and González y González, 1976)

[20] He in fact supplied the water for the famous palaces at Aranjuez.

[21] However, this was not to be at the expense of the cenobitic and mendicant life. Although he denounced excessive activism he was equally wary of excessive penitence. In Pastrana, and later at El Calvario, he would have strong words for brothers who took penitence to an extreme.

[22] John's allusion to his imprisonment in a Letter to Madre Catalina de Jesús, 6th July 1581

[23] *Cantar del alma que se huelga de conocer a Dios por fe*, otherwise known as *la Fonte* or *The Fountain:*

Qué bien sé yo la fonte que mane y corre,
aunque es de noche.

Aquella eterna fonte está escondida,
que bien sé yo do tiene su manida,
aunque es de noche.

Su origen no lo sé, pues no le tiene,
mas sé que todo origen de ella tiene,
aunque es de noche.

Sé que no puede ser cosa tan bella,
y que cielos y tierra beben de ella,
aunque es de noche.

Bien sé que suelo en ella no se halla,
y que ninguno puede vadealla,
aunque es de noche.

Su claridad nunca es oscurecida,
y sé que toda luz de ella es venida,
aunque es de noche.

Sé ser tan caudalosos sus corrientes.
que infiernos, cielos riegan y las gentes,
aunque es de noche.

El corriente que nace de esta fuente
bien sé que es tan capaz y omnipotente,
aunque es de noche.

El corriente que de estas dos procede
sé que ninguna de ellas le precede,
aunque es de noche.

Aquesta eterna fonte está escondida
en este vivo pan por darnos vida,
aunque es de noche.

Aquí se está llamando a las criaturas,
y de esta agua se hartan, aunque a oscuras
porque es de noche.

Aquesta viva fuente que deseo,
en este pan de vida yo la veo,

aunque es de noche.

[24] See Chapter Five below

[25] In P. Silverio de Santa Teresa *Obras*, Vol. V, 1929

[26] A testimonial from another friar explained that this wood could not possibly take a man's weight thus giving credence to the notion that John's escape had had a supernatural element.

[27] A theme of transgression taken up by the contemporary Spanish novelist Juan Goytisola in his 1988 work *Las Virtudes del pájaro solitario*.

[28] The words were from one of the famous hermits of El Calvario, F. Pedro de San Angelo: *Those who know no suffering, in this valley filled with sorrows, have no knowledge of good things, nor have they tasted love, for suffering is the garb lovers wear*. (In Ruiz, 2000: 192)

[29] Written for Ana de Peñalosa, with whom he would later found the Priory at Segovia.

[30] Unlike Diego Evangelista who harboured a grudge against John long after his death, the events of John's death melted the heart of Crisóstomo who would later gain renown as a sympathetic and generous spiritual director and preacher.

[31] See Chrétien de Troyes: *The Story of the Grail*.

[32] I have made Johnson's quote gender neutral as I believe his observation carries for women as much as men.

[33] Literally 'happy fault'. A line from the Easter liturgy intoned by the deacon: 'O Happy Fault! O Necessary Sin of Adam that Gained for us so Great a Redeemer!'

[34] John's version of the *Ordo commendationis animae* in the *Rituale Romanum* 6.7 (See Rodriguez and Kavanaugh, 2003)

[35] Even today the central Sierras of Spain are a wonderful place to hear nightingales. John was well known for loving to sit out at night and no doubt wrote this passage inspired by those experiences. On my visits to Ávila and Segovia I have sometimes been surrounded by fifteen or sixteen nightingales singing in choruses around the Carmelite priories throughout the night such that is was impossible to sleep.

[36] For a precise analysis of how John relates the internal powers of the soul to the persons of the Trinity in union see Howells (2002)

[37] The Abbey was founded by William of Champeaux, a master of the schools of Paris and described by Abelard as 'the first dialectician of his age', founding the abbey after retiring from the schools in 1108. He set up a small community at the site of an old hermitage on the left bank of the Seine just beyond the walls of Paris. Almost, it seems, by accident a community grew up around William who departed in 1113 to be made Bishop of Chalons. His disciple, Gilduin, was elected first Abbot of the community in the same year and under his leadership the abbey grew and flourished. Following the *Rule of St Augustine*, the community was at the forefront of clerical renewal through prayer, study and liturgy.

[38] Although circulating in the West from the eighth century onwards, the collection of writings attributed to 'Dionysius the Areopagite' (See Acts, 17: 34) had only received limited attention and irregular translation until the advent of the twelfth century Parisian schools. Sarracenus produced his version of the *corpus* in 1166–7, the first full translation since Eriugena, some three hundred years earlier. As Dondaine points out (1953: 64), Sarracenus used the glosses of Anastasius and Hugh of St Victor to perfect and advance his own translation. Generally Sarracenus in his translation smoothes out some of the inconsistencies and hard edges in Eriugena to present a more flowing Latin text. In particular, he avoided the strange Greek-Latin hybrid words that Eriugena often produced from his straightforward transliterations of Greek terms. Thus he renders θεοσοφι′ας in Dionysius's *De Theologia Mystica* (hereafter MT) as *divina sapientia* (*lit: divine wisdom*) rather than Eriugena's *theosophia* (*lit: theosophy*). However, he does retain the super-terms introduced by Hilduin and Eriugena (υ′πε′ρθεε changes gender from *superdeus* to *superdea* in MT presumably in reference to the holy *Sapientia*, however the text remains ambiguous with the reference to *trinitas*).

[39] Leclercq suggests that the Dionysian corpus played only a minor role in the Cistercian reforms of the twelfth century. David Bell notes (1978: 265) that Thomas the Cistercian in his Commentary on the *Song of Songs* 'does not seem to care for Pseudo-Dionysius… It is interesting to note the conspicuous lack of Dionysian ideas and terminology in Thomas's works… Thomas, like Bernard, remains Latin.' The same, Leclercq claims, can be said of Bruno and the founders of the Carthusian order.

[40] My translation: *an cognitio Dei melius per penitentem affectum quam per intellectum investigantem habeatur*

[41] *et cognoscamus quoniam, appropriate loquendo, sicut contemplatio est in vi cognitive intelligentie, sic in vi affective correspondente reponitur mistica theologia*

[42] Unlike Teresa, John of course would have studied Dionysius and his commentators directly at Salamanca.

[43] Louth also draws the parallel with Aristotle's distinction within the Eleusian mysteries, that the initiate does not *learn* (*mathein*) anything but *experiences or suffers* (*pathein*) something—(Aristotle, *De Philosophia frag* 15)

[44] The *sympatheia*, as McGinn following Rorem (1982) points out, is a key term in late Neoplatonism in making the connection between the different levels of the 'theurgy' possible: '*sympathy* for Dionysius is not so much an ontological bond by which material things are manipulated to acquire an access to the upper world as it is an affinity for 'reading' the inner meaning of the hierarchies as manifestations of the Thearchy.' (McGinn, 1991: 172). Hence Dionysius's adoption of the phrase 'so as to speak' to suggest he is adapting a term from the Neoplatonic school.

[45] On this, see especially Turner (1995)

[46] As well as references previously given see de Andía (1993) on John's relationship with Dionysius at Salamanca.

[47] To be found in P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, *Obras* 1929: Vol. 1

[48] Exactly the same play on *sabor* and *saber* found in Osuna and Teresa of Ávila

[49] *Sobreperfectos*—a direct allusion to Dionysius's *hyper*-terms we discussed earlier

[50] *Allí me dio su pecho,*
allí me enseñó ciencia muy sabrosa;
y yo le di de hecho
a mí, sin dejar cosa:
allí le prometí de ser su Esposa.

[51] A reference to Ana de Jesús, dedicatee of the *Spiritual Canticle*, see Chapter One.

[52] See Brown (1990), Harmless (2004) and Chryssavgis (2003)

[53] See, for example 'Can we solve the mind-body problem?' Mind 98 (1989) reprinted in *Philosophy of Mind: A Guide and Anthology* ed J. Heil, Oxford: OUP, 2004

[54] See, for example 'The Unconscious'/'Das Unbewusste' by Freud reprinted in *Metapsychologishe Schriften* ed A. Holder. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2007. English Translation by J. Strachey in *On Metapsychology —The Theory of Psychoanalysis*. The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 11 and 'Psychological Types'/ *Psychologische Typen*, by Jung reprinted in *Psychological Types* by H. G. Baynes and R. Hull.

[55] For some interesting examples of how John's category has been used in contemporary American culture see Payne (2000).

[56] *en que canta el alma la dichosa ventura que tuvo en pasar por la oscura noche de la fe, en desnudez y purgación suya, a la unión del Amado*.

1. En una noche oscura,
con ansias, en amores inflamada,
¡oh dichosa ventura!,
salí sin ser notada
estando ya mi casa sosegada.

2. A oscuras y segura,
por la secreta escala, disfrazada,
¡oh dichosa ventura!,
a oscuras y en celada,
estando ya mi casa sosegada.

3. En la noche dichosa,
en secreto, que nadie me veía,
ni yo miraba cosa,
sin otra luz y guía
sino la que en el corazón ardía.

4. Aquésta me guiaba
más cierto que la luz del mediodía,
adonde me esperaba
quien yo bien me sabía,
en parte donde nadie parecía.

5. ¡Oh noche que guiaste!
¡Oh noche amable más que la alborada!

¡Oh noche que juntaste
Amado con amada,
amada en el Amado transformada!

6. En mi pecho florido,
que entero para él solo se guardaba,
allí quedó dormido,
y yo le regalaba,
y el ventalle de cedros aire daba.

7. El aire de la almena,
cuando yo sus cabellos esparcía,
con su mano serena
en mi cuello hería
y todos mis sentidos suspendía.

8. Quedéme y olvidéme,
el rostro recliné sobre el Amado,
cesó todo y dejéme,
dejando mi cuidado
entre las azucenas olvidado.

[57] With thanks to Fr Junjun Agruda OCD

[58] As with John, so Teresa of Avila had a profound understanding of what we would today call mental illness and she calls 'melancholia'. See, for example, *Camino de Perfección* 24.4, *The Conceptos* 6.12, *Las Moradas* 3.1.6, 4.1.9, 6.1.8, 6.2.5,7, 6.3.2, 6.8.3 and Chapter 7 of the *Fundaciones: De cómo se han de aver con las que tienen melancholia*. Teresa is particularly unhappy in M 6.1.8 with confessors who dismiss spiritual movements as 'melancholia': 'he fears everything and finds in everything something to doubt because he sees these unusual experiences… everything is immeadiately condemned as from the devil or melancholy. And the world is so full of this melancholy that I am not surprised. There is so much of it now in the world and the devil causes so many evils through this means that confessors are very right in fearing it and considering it carefully'.

[59] Evagrius calls them the *epithymia* and the *thymos* building on ideas from Plato. See *Ad Monachos* and the *Praktikos*. Also Harmless, 2004: 322–338

[60] Evagrius calls it the 'noonday demon' that attacks the monk or nun in the middle of the day when they are feeling most fed up with the boredom of their task. See *Praktikos*, 12

[61] For more on the importance of this chapter see Green, 2007 and Johnston, 1991

[62] See footnote 48

[63] As we saw in the previous chapter, this is an important word for both Teresa and John, but difficult to translate. Joys, tastes, favours and delights will all do. It is a deliberately ambiguous word and it is noteworthy that when Teresa first uses it in the *Libro de La Vida* it is in reference to sensual pleasures rather than the things of God. As she moves through the book it becomes more associated with spiritual matters. This studied ambiguity towards the sensual and the spiritual in both Teresa and John may account for increased contemporary interest in their work.

[64] See here my forthcoming article on Teresa's use of the strategy of embodiment in the *Conceptos*. To be published in *Sources of Transformation: Revitalising Traditions of Christian Spirituality for Today. Continuum 2010*.

[65] See forthcoming article by myself in *Sources of Transformation: Revitalising Traditions of Christian Spirituality for Today*. Continuum 2010 and footnote 62 above.

[66] The Dionysian theology we explored in Chapter Three is often referred to as the 'apophatic' path or 'path of unknowing' (or *via negativa*). It has traditionally been contrasted with the 'cataphatic' path or *via positiva* which emphasises the knowable attributes of the divine rather than the unknowable.

[67] *unos la llaman teología mística, que quiere decir escondida, porque en el secreto escondimiento del corazón la enseña el buen maestro Jesús*

[68] *la cual aún es en dos maneras: una se llama especulativa o escudriñadora, que es el mismo, y otra escondida, que es la que se trata o a la que se intitula este tercero alfabeto; no que en él presuma yo enseñarla, pues ninguno de los mortales la enseñó, porque Christo guardó para sí este oficio de enseñar en secreto a los corazones en que viviese aquesta teología escondida como ciencia divina y mucho más excelente que la otra teología de que hablamos primer… Esta teología se dice más perfecta o mejor que la primera, según dice Gersón, porque de la primera como de un principio se servir*.

[69] See the Prologue to *The Rule of St Benedict*.

[70] For a summary of these disputes see Duvivier, 1971

[71] *I am dying of love, darling. What shall I do? Die!*

[72] This manuscript has on the top in writing which is now generally thought to be Saint John's: 'This book is the rough copy (*barrador*) of which a fresh version has been made, Fray Juan de la +'. The date is thought be around 1586/7 which would date it to John's time as Prior of Granada.

[73] The review of which inspired Auden's comments on Saint John with which we began the book.

[74] For more on the life and work of Asín Palacios see Valdivia Válor (1992)

[75] We can also add Swietlicki's struggle to make John a secret Jewish Kabbalist in Swietlicki (1986)

[76] See *Summa Theologiae 1a2ae.49–54*, Vol. 22 trans Antony Kenny: 'Dispositions, like capacities, are concerned with good and evil, and dispositions, like capacities, are not always exercised in action' (49, 4.3)

[77] See *Anthony de Mello and the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*. By G. O'Collins in *Sources of Transformation* Continuum, forthcoming

[78] See, for example, *Medieval Mystical Tradition and Saint John of the Cross* by A Benedictine of Stanbrook, 1954

[79] With thanks to Sr Aurora OCD, Ciudad Real

[80] See here in particular Lonsdale (1992)

[81] St Benedict's advice as to the nature of the Abbot: 'He should always let mercy triumph over judgement so that he too may win mercy. He must hate faults but love the brothers. When he must punish them, he should use prudence and avoid extremes; otherwise, by rubbing too hard to remove the rust, he may break the vessel. He is to distrust his own frailty and remember not to crush the bruised reed' *Rule of St Benedict*: 64.10